Examining the Rourou: Exploring Pākehā Educators' Preparedness for and Practices in Teaching Māori Texts in the English Classroom

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Abstract

This research investigates the ways in which Pākehā English teachers in English-medium secondary schools teach Māori texts. English teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand are increasingly teaching Māori-authored and Māori-focused texts as the education system grapples with addressing centuries of inequitable practices and outcomes for Māori ākonga. Research supports culturally responsive teaching and learning practices in improving student success and wellbeing, and the sector has been making strides in incorporating mātauranga Māori in many areas of the curriculum. However, scholarship has not yet adequately interrogated how teachers in secondary English classrooms, the majority of whom are Pākehā women, engage with Māori texts. This is especially crucial in the wake of significant changes to the English curriculum which now mandates the teaching of Māori-authored texts in Years 7 through 10. This research bridges that gap, illustrating Pākehā teacher perspectives, views, barriers, and enablers when teaching Māori texts. This is achieved through semi-structured interviews with six teachers, and a thematic analysis of their shared stories, which are presented as narrative case studies. The findings highlight the need for stronger structural support for teachers when teaching Māori texts. This includes more robust preparation in Initial Teacher Education, opportunities for professional collaboration, and the development of reflexive teaching practices. Teachers also described vulnerability and resilience as important elements of culturally responsive practice. The findings offer insights for educators to support their own reflexive practice and highlight potential systemic changes needed within Initial Teacher Education and Ministry of Education subject support to better prepare current and future non-Māori English teachers to work confidently with Māori texts.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Study

In Aotearoa New Zealand, integrating Māori literature and perspectives into English classrooms is vital for fostering cultural inclusivity, providing equitable education and equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori (Māori students), and creating a new generation of critical thinkers (Berryman et al., 2018; Bonner et al., 2018). As such, an increasing number of subject English kaiako (teachers) in secondary school classrooms are teaching texts by Māori creators and sharing Māori experiences and perspectives as the profession sees the overwhelming positives of their inclusion. These kaiako, who are predominantly Pākehā, are acknowledging the importance of culturally relevant texts alongside a desire to do better by ākonga Māori (Ferguson-Brown, 2022; Ferguson-Brown, 2024). In direct response to this, recent changes to the English curriculum have, for the first time in New Zealand's educational history, required teachers to include Māori-authored texts in programmes of study for secondary school students. This has been driven by teacher demand for their visibility and centrality after a protracted process of English curriculum refresh in which it was kaiako who identified a lack of reference to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in curriculum draft documents. Other factors influencing the teaching of Māori texts becoming so relevant include professional responsibilities in relation to the professional teacher code to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and be a good treaty partner (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2025), and pressures and expectations from colleagues and Heads of Faculty, as will be evidenced in my research.

The last three decades have been transformational for Aotearoa New Zealand education, as the state reckons with the devastating impacts of colonisation on ākonga Māori, and on mātauranga Māori (knowledge, wisdom, understanding, skill). Research has been conducted and policy developed to address these historical failings, with much of the scholarship focused on the critical impact of culturally responsive pedagogies (as will be

covered in my literature review). Many well-known New Zealand academics – a large majority of whom are Māori – write extensively and provocatively about the implications and potential of culturally responsive pedagogies, as well as more recently about the possibilities of decolonised curricula (Bishop et al., 2014). One key outcome of this research and policy has been a contesting of traditional and established understandings of "knowledge", with early childhood, primary and secondary schools moving to incorporate mātauranga Māori into curricula across subject areas (McPhail et al., 2023). Visibly, these shifts have been implemented in social studies, maths and science curriculum, with scholarship investigating the integration. However, little has been written in consideration of what this looks like in a subject English context.

The importance of Indigenous texts in education is well-documented (Bacalja & Bliss, 2019; Johnson & Sassi, 2023), and as a profession we know it has many positive impacts. While the teaching of indigenous texts in English classrooms has been researched and considered in studies across the Tasman in Australia (Bacalja & Bliss, 2019), and by academics in countries such as Canada and the United States (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Debassige & Wakeham, 2020; Hanson, 2020), there is a notable gap in literature in the New Zealand context that focuses on understanding how Pākehā educators perceive and approach the teaching of specifically Māori works. This research therefore seeks to contribute towards addressing this gap and explore how to support kaiako in navigating the complexities of teaching Māori texts ethically, effectively, and authentically. It aims to support kaiako in wrestling with these challenges, contributing to the equitable representation of Māori voices and perspectives in English education. With the recent mandating of Māori-authored texts, this issue becomes even more vital and pressing. The title takes inspiration from the whakataukī (Māori proverb) "Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi" which is often translated to "With your food basket and my food basket the people will thrive". This whakataukī is considered to reference collaboration – with all parties bringing something to the table to offer their communities, to nourish them in some way, in order for the people to thrive.

I write this thesis in the hopes that it may resonate with kaiako, particularly Pākehā kaiako, though I hope that those outside of this group can also find value in its findings and lessons. I write this thesis so we may collectively, as a profession, work towards a decolonised curriculum and a more equitable Aotearoa New Zealand. The intention of this research is not to tell kaiako what to do – I will not be creating check lists or putting out top tips or strategies. Instead, I see this research as an invitation to engage meaningfully and honestly in reflexive practice. My hope is that in sharing the stories of my participants – my imagined reader's colleagues – English kaiako will be provided either windows or mirrors that allow them to consider and reflect on the meaning of "te rourou" – or the "food basket". My wero (challenge) for my colleagues is a simple one: consider what it is you may need to go and gather to nourish our ākonga.

1.2 Positioning the Researcher

This research has come out of a genuine curiosity around the teaching of Māori texts in high school English classrooms. Around five years ago, as a fresh-faced English teacher, I read an article by Australian academic Alice Healy-Ingram entitled "Teaching Indigenous Literature: An ethics of voice" (2011). In the article, Healy-Ingram recalls an experience from early in her teaching career when she delivered a lecture on Aboriginal literature. During her first lecture on the topic, she projected a line of "text" a colleague had suggested she use as part of the learning. An Aboriginal student in the class pointed out that the context in which Healy-Ingram was teaching the traditional "text" was incorrect. The student was deeply offended by the lack of understanding displayed, and the carelessness with which her cultural artifact was treated. An ongoing dialogue between Healy-Ingram and the student then applied the correct context to the text, and the student was able to educate both her lecturer and her classmates across the semester. The experience was moving for Healy-Ingram as she confronted her "act of misappropriation" (p. 70), grappled with the power dynamics of her classroom and ultimately

considered how non-Indigenous kaiako can teach the analysis of Indigenous art and cultural expression in ethical ways that allow 'Indigenous voices' to be centred in the English classroom.

> The scene sets a stark picture of power relations in the teaching space and the proactive responsibility in that all teachers have to think deeply about their approach to Indigenous literature in education. (p. 72)

This article spoke to me because it was a question I had been grappling with and found myself talking to my colleagues – both Māori and Pākehā alike – about often.

Further, positioning myself as a researcher requires understanding and reflecting on the unique experience I personally had as a Pākehā English student in mid-2000s Aotearoa New Zealand. The high school I attended, Church College of New Zealand, was a Māori majority school, with 80 per cent of the student body reporting Māori whakapapa (genealogy). Alongside a Māori student body, the staff of the school was also heavily Māori. Through my four years of English study, all three of my English teachers were Māori. In Year 9, I was taught Witi Ihimaera (also an alumnus of Church College) short stories such as "A Game of Cards", and Niki Caro's *Whale Rider* based on Ihimaera's 1987 novel through the lens of a Māori teacher. These texts were located and taught within a Māori world view, by pure fact that my teacher was Māori. It was an understood aspect of the school that students were seeds of Rangiātea, born of greatness, as the whakataukī (Māori proverb) and the well-known waiata (song) *He Kakano Ahau* it inspired asserts. Māori success and Māori excellence were inherent within the school's culture – success as Māori was expected, and success as Māori was affirmed. If anything, at times, my lack of Māori identity made me feel like an outsider where I longed to be part of the dominant group. I lived in the village by the school community, and so my life was lived alongside Māori and Māori values – my teachers were Māori, my friends were Māori, my church leaders were Māori. This was my norm. It wasn't until I was in tertiary study in a first-year class ironically entitled Biculturalism in New Zealand that I understood how unique my secondary education was. In this class, one Pākehā student admitted that her family turned the television

over during the haka whilst watching All Blacks games. This incident, one of many that flabbergasted me, left me pondering how a Pākehā girl who was raised in the same city as I had could have such a diametrically opposed view of te ao Māori (the Māori world), and of tangata Māori (people) in general.

Fast forward to 2019, as a first year English teacher at a co-educational urban secondary school. I am now charged with selecting and teaching my own texts to the students in front of me. I, as many teachers do, use “Butterflies” by Patricia Grace as a Year 9 short story study. And, despite my background, I completely skate over the cultural context of Patricia Grace in my teaching, instead focusing on “perspectives”. A few years later, I deliberately decide to teach Taika Waititi’s *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* in my Year 10 course to include a Māori perspective, but it’s not until the end of year essays that I realise via a student’s fully formed response the depth of manaakitanga (hospitality or generosity) in the film, especially through the characters of TK and Kahu, and that while I might have taught a Māori text, I did not ground it in Māori concepts.

Since then, I have been fascinated by how a largely Pākehā workforce teaches Māori text. In a burgeoning era of Māori voice, with literary figures such as Taika Waititi, Lindsey Hera Bird, Whiti Hereaka, and Alice Te Punga Somerville, I wanted to know what kaiako were teaching, how they were teaching, and through what lens they were teaching. I wondered how students were engaging with the texts. I wondered about their success – all the different measurements of it – in the eyes of the teachers and students. Ultimately, I decided to locate this study on teachers, because of the impact they have on shaping narratives, though I did consider collecting student voice alongside the teachers. While this study began broadly by looking at non-Māori teachers, it now focuses on Pākehā because of the demographic who responded to the call for participants. On reflection, I find this fitting as it does reflect the dominant group disseminating the knowledge to our students.

1.3 Research Questions

The entire thrust of this study is to explore and uncover the ways in which Pākehā teachers teach and experience the teaching of Māori texts in English classrooms. The teacher is positioned to answer the question by sharing their experiences, attitudes, and perspectives. As such, the study has two main research questions:

1. What are Pākehā teachers' experiences and perspectives on teaching Māori texts in English classrooms?
2. What strategies do Pākehā teachers employ to incorporate Māori texts in English classrooms, and what are the barriers and facilitators influencing their practice?

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

This research is organised into six chapters. Chapter Two – Literature Review covers the historical context of Aotearoa New Zealand's education system, as well as exploring culturally responsive pedagogy as it shapes the teaching of ākonga Māori, mātauranga Māori, and Māori texts. This chapter unpacks literature relating to educational research and policy in Aotearoa New Zealand related to what is currently known around barriers and facilitators for engaging in culturally responsive teaching. The review finally looks at the context of subject English, the uncertain, contested landscape of the curriculum, and perspectives on defining a Māori text.

Chapter Three – Research Design the methodology chapter unpacks how the study was conducted. It considers the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study, as well as the decision to combine aspects of the qualitative methods of narrative inquiry and case study. It details the selection process of the participants, their demographic make-up and the justification to use semi-structured interviews. It finishes by discussing thematic analysis in interpretating the data, and the ethical imperatives in conducting the research, incorporating aspects of kaupapa Māori research.

Chapter Four – Findings presents the data collected in the research, in which each of the six interviewed participants is given their own unique narrative, a pūrākau (story) that champions their voice and experiences. These narratives are presented alongside contextual information to help fully locate their experience, as is consistent with the ontology and epistemology the research is grounded in. At the conclusion of the six narratives, a summary identifies the themes that connect the pūrākau.

Chapter Five – Discussion uses the thematic discourses of the previous chapter to form the basis of analysis to answer the two research questions. It uses the literature explored in Chapter Two as well as supplementary literature to explain, interpret and assert the themes arising from the findings.

Chapter Six – Conclusion summarises the issues and learnings arising from the study, as well as detailing the implications and limitations of the work. Possible areas of further study are also identified.

Appendixes include a glossary of kupu Māori (Māori words) used in this thesis, a list of Māori texts mentioned in the interviews, and participant information used in this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

This study explores the ways in which Pākehā English teachers in secondary schools teach texts that are either created by Māori and/or explore Māori perspectives and experiences, herein after referred to as Māori texts. It investigates how equipped the English teaching force is by considering existing barriers that prevent teachers doing this well, what enablers and supports are available, and what attitudes and experiences teachers have when teaching aspects of te ao Māori and Māori storytelling.

As of 2026, there is a curriculum imperative to teach Māori-authored texts between years 7 and 10, with the Ministry of Education releasing and enforcing a new curriculum in which teachers “must” engage with Māori-authored works (Ministry of Education, 2025b, pp. 42, 53). However, the profession at large has been driving this Māori text inclusion, pushing the Ministry to make them more central in policy (Ministry of Education, 2025c). The new curriculum does not mandate which specific Māori-authored texts must be taught, but the Ministry of Education has released a list of suggested texts alongside the new curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2025d).

Text selection has historically been open to the interests of the teacher in New Zealand English classrooms. The text choices that these teachers, who in New Zealand are primarily Pākehā women (Ferguson-Brown, 2022), are making have an indelible impact on student beliefs and attitudes, shaping their views on culture, society and the world around them (Gay, 2000).

The depictions of Māori that teachers explore through texts, and the unpacking that is conducted alongside them, can culturally sustain Māori identity and self-assertion, or culturally undermine and erode these very same things. With a clear cultural majority making decisions that hold such power and impact for ākonga, some level of bias – whether intentional or not –

cannot be avoided. Consequently, teachers need to be reflexive in practice to examine what biases they may bring to the table.

As curriculum changes come to fruition, pressure and expectation are now placed on Year 7 to 10 English teachers to teach Māori-authored texts, whether or not they feel prepared to do so. As a result, the ways kaiako approach text selection and the teaching of text content and ideas need interrogation, as do the factors that both inhibit and enable teachers to successfully include Māori texts in their programmes of learning.

There is a significant amount of existing literature that examines the ways in which non-Māori and Pākehā teachers can prepare to teach Māori *students* (Corlett, 2020; Honey, 2014; Lang, 2013), as well as a plethora of literature that looks at culturally responsive teaching, cultural competency building, and the place of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) in high school classrooms (See Berryman et al., 2018; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop et al., 2003; CORE Education & Riki-Waaka, n.d.; Finn, 2022; Karaka-Clarke, 2022). However, there seems to be a lack of literature or scholarship around the experiences of teachers teaching Māori texts, and how this might impact outcomes for ākonga encountering and engaging in the learning. The literature in this review discusses culturally responsive teaching and makes connections between culturally responsive capacity and teacher capability in the context of this study. It also draws upon the works of academics in other colonised context countries to apply their learnings of non-Indigenous teachers teaching indigenous texts.

The first section of this review unpacks the state of ākonga Māori achievement in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the historically inequitable practices that have led to indigenous disenfranchisement. It explores culturally responsive pedagogies and their application to respond to disenfranchisement, introducing teacher practice as a core component in doing so. The section then covers further research, frameworks and policy developed to address Māori disenfranchisement and incorporate mātauranga Māori into curricula, interrogating their potential to be enabling factors or possibility to act as barriers. The section concludes by looking

at the role of Initial Teacher Education to support this work, and the impact both real and perceived cultural incompetency has on teacher practice.

The second section critically examines subject English itself and highlights the enduringly unique element of New Zealand's secondary English curriculum: teacher autonomy around text selection. This concept of text selection is explored, as well as considering how it can act as a tool of culturally responsive pedagogy. The section then moves into discussing Māori texts' inclusion, or lack thereof in New Zealand curricula, and attempts to make sense of the varied ideas of a "Māori text". It concludes by unpacking the current political climate in which the most significant changes to New Zealand's English curriculum in 20 years are explored, as well as their impact on teachers and students.

With these focuses and their learnings in place, there is then a much clearer picture painted of how prepared New Zealand's Pākehā English teachers may be to rise to the wero (challenge) to enact all of the expected changes laid out for them.

2.2 Māori Education, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Decolonial Practice

This section reviews literature that considers historical aspects of the Education system in Aotearoa New Zealand that have contributed to the current state of ākonga Māori achievement. It covers recent initiatives to update the education system to a more responsive pedagogy that culturally considers the needs of all students, but particularly of ākonga Māori. It looks at the work of seminal researchers and the policy put in place in the wake of their findings, considering how they enable (or inhibit) equitable teaching and learning.

2.2.1 Te Tiriti, History and ākonga Māori

The New Zealand education system has historically failed Māori learners (Office of the Auditor General, 2012). Since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its English language counterpart in 1840, the New Zealand government has been locked into a legally binding

relationship in which Māori interests would be protected under the crown. In the current understanding of Tiriti principles, this protection comes with partnership and full participation, with the Crown guaranteeing to uphold the mana (honour, pride and esteem) of Māori, in a mana ōrite or equal partnership relationship (Berryman et al., 2018). However, this relationship has continually been defined by the Crown, since the signing of Te Tiriti in which Māori were forced into assimilation through governmental policy that affected the ability of the relationship to be reciprocal, and denied Māori the benefits the crown guaranteed. The ongoing effect of this early relationship, and its unequal continuation, has led to ongoing inequity across a range of social indices, including educational achievement (Walker, 2016). If we look specifically to the Crown's education system and its policies, we see perpetuated narratives that have led to the privileging and domination of Pākehā knowledge systems, denigrating mātauranga Māori, disadvantaging ākonga Māori, and breaching obligations set out in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Office of the Auditor General, 2012). Of particular interest in this review is Article Three of The Treaty of Waitangi (1840):

> For this agreed arrangement therefore concerning the government of the Queen, the Queen of England will protect all the ordinary people of New Zealand and will give them the same rights and duties of citizenship as the people of England.

The spirit of this article focuses on equity, through the "same rights" promised and the overall understanding of the document as offering protection, partnership and participation for both signatories (Berryman et al., 2018). In modern application of the article, this is taken to mean educational barriers will be removed to ensure equitable outcomes, that educational content and delivery represent the heritage of both Māori and Pākehā, and that there is equitable representation of Māori voice and mātauranga Māori (CORE Education & Riki-Waaka, n.d.). The measure of success for the Ministry would be a bicultural curriculum that reflects both Māori and Pākehā worldviews and specifically does not over-represent the Pākehā worldview (Ministry of Education, 2021a).

While a full discussion of the history of Māori treatment in the education system is beyond the scope of this thesis, Honey (2014) provides an in-depth review of literature of factors that led to Māori achievement outcomes. She writes that education has long been part of the "civilising" process in colonised countries and New Zealand is no different. In unpacking this complicated history, she cites the work of seminal Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith: "Schooling, and this included university education, was a primary institute for taming and civilising the natives and forging a nation which was connected at a concrete level with the historical and moral processes of Britain" (Smith, 1997, as cited in Honey, 2014, p. 14). Honey (2014) then details the large set pieces on New Zealand's educational history including The Native Schools Acts of 1958 and 1967, school inspector Henry Taylor's 1862 report advocating Māori were "better calculated by nature to get their living by manual than mental labour" (p. 12), the development of education material by the Department of Education that denigrated Māori and depicted them as savage-like (Shields et al., 2005), and the pervasive ideology that Māori were intellectually inferior to their Pākehā peers. By the 1960s, the adverse effect of these historical wrongs on Māori student achievement were becoming clear. The 1961 Hunn report details the marginalisation, inequality and impoverishment Māori were enduring (Shields et al., 2005). By 1989, with the Education Act, The Treaty of Waitangi and its principles were finally brought into the conversation of education, with schools forced to address the equity issues ākonga Māori were facing. In saying all this, the damage was done.

The trauma of 200 years of colonial influence on Māori in English-medium education is clear. On average, Māori learners experience worse outcomes on every major education metric used against their peers of other ethnicities (Ministry of Education, 2024a) from literacy to numeracy, starting from the ability to recognise letters in their early years. Ākonga Māori make up 25 per cent of all school aged learners and are a growing demographic within our schooling systems, but they consistently fail to achieve expected benchmarks, with 18 percent of Māori students leaving school without achieving National Certificate of Educational Achievement

(NCEA) – the basic qualification on offer in New Zealand high schools (Gerritsen, 2024). A contributing factor is proven lower expectations of ākonga Māori from schools and teachers, a deficit theorisation that results in lower achievement. Research shows this lower expectation comes with messages that devalue ākonga Māori and their knowledge. As such, it is unsurprising that in 2022 only 59 percent of Māori 15-year-olds felt a sense of belonging at school (Ministry of Education, 2024b.) This persistent and pernicious underachievement underscores the need for culturally responsive kaiako (teachers) to address such disparity.

2.2.2 Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive pedagogies are central to this study as they are the foundation upon which teachers build their teaching of Māori texts. As such, exploring understandings of culturally responsive pedagogies is crucial when attempting to address my Research Questions. The term *culturally responsive pedagogy* was coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in the early 1990s following her research into effective teaching practices for African American students in the United States. Her findings around what made these teachers so efficacious is their ability to deeply understand, respect and reflect the cultural background of their students in their practice and their approach to students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In addition to acknowledging, validating and integrating their students' cultural dimensions, these teachers also had high expectations of their students and challenged them to see the socio-political aspects at play in the world around them. Ladson-Billings work suggests cultural pedagogy rests on the three criteria: students must experience academic success, develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and develop a critical consciousness in which they "challenge the status quo of the current social order" (p. 160).

Gay, another prominent voice of culturally responsive scholarship, builds on the work of Ladson-Billings by creating a framework for teachers for implementation of a culturally responsive way of teaching. Gay writes "culturally responsive teachers . . . validate, facilitate,

liberate and empower ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success" (2000, pp. 43-44). Her scholarship argues students are empowered to succeed when they see their culture being valued and integrated into their learning – thus allowing them to cultivate “cultural integrity”. Students thus feel their knowledge and life experience is seen and validated and feel a sense of belonging in their education spaces.

Culturally sustaining frameworks have also recently moved into teacher lexicons, as researchers emphasise that rather than “respond” to diversity in the classroom, the education system and its agent should “sustain” the cultural competency that already exists (Berryman et al., 2018; The Education Hub, 2022). Culturally sustaining teaching engages in a subtle refocus of priority, viewing culture as something worthy of protection and expansion independent of learning, rather than a tool that can be tapped into to improve instruction.

2.2.3 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for ākonga Māori

Put into the Aotearoa New Zealand context, understanding of Māori history and culture becomes a clear and concrete starting point to integrate the research of Ladson-Billings and Gay into practice. Echoing Ladson-Billings and Gay, Māori academics Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman argue culture is king in student achievement, writing that students bringing their own “culturally generated ways of knowing and learning” is “*the* essential ingredient” (2006, p. 5) [emphasis added] needed to improve student engagement and enable students to bring who they are and how they make sense of the world into their classroom experiences. This forms the basis of *Te Kotahitanga* and *Ka Hikitia*, two seminal projects brought about by Bishop and Berryman which will be explored in more detail in a later section.

In the Ministry of Education's 2024 Māori Education Overview report, it affirms that one of the enduring strategies to strengthen Māori success in education (and thus for teachers to successfully teach their ākonga Māori) is acknowledging that Māori identity, language and

culture matter for Māori learners. This is reflected in the expectations of the profession itself through the *2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession*. The eight standards it details set expectations of effective teaching practice, centring around professional knowledge, practice, and engagement (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2025). These criteria form the basis of yearly teacher appraisals and teachers must provide evidence that they meet these standards to maintain a current practising certificate. Of the eight standards, the first specifically focuses on Te Tiriti and requires teachers to "[d]emonstrate commitment to tangata whenuatanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand" (p. 9). It affirms that teachers must recognise and understand the "unique" role of tangata whenua in Aotearoa New Zealand, understand and acknowledge "the histories, heritages, languages and cultures" of Māori, practise and develop te reo and tikanga Māori and, most potently for this research, "[d]esign teaching and learning experiences that reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in New Zealand including affirming for all learners the knowledge, identity, language and culture of te ao Māori and tangata whenuatanga"(p. 9). Further to this, Standard 3 of the document focuses on knowing learners, asserting that teachers should "[u]nderstand culturally responsive teaching" in that they "[d]emonstrate an understanding of how to richly contextualise teaching and learning experiences to learners' culture, backgrounds, and interests to bring the curriculum to life and help them progress their learning" (p. 11). New Zealand educators are thus not only well versed in the language of culturally responsive pedagogy but expected to engage in culturally responsive teaching in the classroom.

2.2.4 Research and Policy on Māori Education

These standards are a welcome adjustment to expectations after more than three decades of research by Māori educationalists and academics. This growing body of research continues to consider what can be done to support ākonga Māori and enable their kaiako to be effective through re-examination of pedagogies, curriculum and learning systems (Hotere-

Barnes, 2015). *Te Kotahitanga*, *Ka Hikitia*, *Tātaiako* and *Mana ōrite mo te Mātauranga Māori* have all significantly impacted contemporary understanding around best practices of culturally responsive teaching in support of Māori learners.

Te Kotahitanga (Bishop et al., 2003) remains an instrumental project in this space for its centring of student experience. Its emphatic findings show positive teacher-student interactions and relationships are the crucial factor to learning outcomes. The study called on kaiako to become more reflexive in their practice, rejecting deficit thinking about their Māori learners. It contributed to the development of *Ka Hikitia* (2008), a cross-agency Māori education strategy with the overarching strategic intent of Māori enjoying educational success as Māori. *Ka Hikitia* expects teachers to have high expectations of their Māori learners, engage with whānau (family) as active participants in their learner's education, and incorporate Māori identity, language and culture into curriculum and daily teaching practice. The strategy has had several iterations and was republished in 2020 with updated goals and a 30-year vision.

Tātaiako (2011) was developed by the Ministry of Education as a cultural competencies resource for teachers. Much like *Ka Hikitia*, it advocates for Māori potential, with a strengths-based focus on the potential of Māori learners as the central approach to raising achievement (Hetaraka, 2019). The 19-page long document focuses on five key Māori concepts, intending to support teachers to effectively teach Māori learners. However, this document did not come without criticism. Stewart (2016) points out that despite the document asserting that it is designed for teachers to support their work, it "contains no explanation of how to use the competencies, merely referring the reader to further guidance available online" (para. 38). She goes on to write:

> Tātaiako claims to provide a tool for measuring the cultural competence of teachers, but actually does little besides support the fallacious policy notion that classroom teachers, not wider social and historical processes, are responsible for ongoing poor educational outcomes for Māori students. (para. 46)

Further criticism still is drawn around *Tātaiako's* lack of inclusion of mātauranga Māori despite its focus on raising Māori achievement. Mātauranga Māori is the "basis of Māori cultural structures and understandings" (Hetaraka, 2019, p. 164) and resources supporting Māori achievement that fail to outline the essentiality of mātauranga Māori and related pedagogical practices are "absurd". "This is perhaps indicative of the minimal value placed on utilising Māori knowledge bases to raise academic success in the current education system" (p. 164).

Perhaps such criticism drove the development of *Mana ōrite mō te mātauranga Māori*, one of seven core pillars of the Ministry of Education's NCEA Change Programme. The programme is the most significant reform of New Zealand's senior secondary schooling in almost two decades. It was introduced under Jacinda Ardern's Labour Government in 2020 after consultation with the education community to address inequities such as racism, bias, deficit thinking, which were widening margins of achievement between ākonga Māori and their Pākehā counterparts, and the undervaluing of Māori mātauranga (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a). Mana ōrite, often directly translated as "equal status", means mātauranga Māori is given as much mana (prestige or status) as traditionally taught Western or Pāhekā knowledge (Berryman et al., 2018). The policy, when implemented correctly, would create parity between Māori interests and Pākehā interests in the classroom, and ensure ākonga Māori would see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Mana ōrite engages teachers in the work of creating this parity within their classrooms by incorporating mātauranga Māori into their teaching programmes, though there is no formalised process by which this is being appraised or assessed. It is worth noting that the change programme is now under the guidance of the Luxon National government which, as will be explored later in the literature review, does not explicitly value the inclusion of mātauranga Māori in their further development of the reform. As such, the future of mana ōrite as a central pou (pillar) in the refresh programme remains uncertain.

2.2.5 Decolonising and Indigenising Frameworks

Two frameworks complementary to culturally responsive pedagogies are decolonising and indigenising educational approaches. Decolonising practice has found momentum in recent years as scholars and students alike argue for decolonised curricula. This work requires systemic recognition of privilege and power dynamics in learning environments, and the disruption and dismantling of colonially curated systems and knowledge that have historically subjugated and exploited indigenous populations (Arday et al., 2021; Brunette-Debassige & Wakeham, 2020; Elkington et al., 2020; Ormond, 2022). An example of colonially curated systems would be that of the hierarchical teacher-student relationship discussed in Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), in which teachers are given inherent value and power as active agents while students are seen as beneficiaries, recipients and passive objects. Indigenising frameworks argue for the flourishing of indigenous knowledges, epistemologies, and languages (Brunette-Debassige & Wakeham, 2020). Indigenisation should foreground Indigenous voice and be led by Indigenous peoples to ensure self-determination and "prevent further problems of appropriation" (p. 13). Another relevant extension of culturally responsive pedagogical practice is that of anti-racist pedagogies, defined by Kishimoto (2018) as the confrontation of internalised racial oppression or superiority through educator humility, critical reflection, and commitment to examination of impacts power imbalances have on teaching and learning.

2.2.6 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Initial Teacher Education

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Aotearoa New Zealand is facing challenges with public perception, mostly due to declining trainee numbers, and public discourse around lax selection processes which has led to "poor quality teachers" (Gunn & Trevethan, 2023). In a 2021 discussion paper titled "Initial Teacher Education 2040" published by NZEI Te Riu Roa reviewing the current challenging state of ITE providers, the union argue that the system is

fragmented, under-resourced and suffering from a competitive model. However, it proposes systemic changes centring on honouring Te Tiriti more faithfully may be the antidote to a problematic system.

> A genuinely bicultural model has the capacity to address deep seated issues in education, redress the impacts of colonisation on education of Māori and non-Māori, and combat systemic racism and discrimination. It will further embed and normalise Te Reo Māori and Mātauranga Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, making this not only a central aspect of ITE, but a central aspect of the overall design of the education system and the educational experiences of all tamariki. (n.d., p. 17)

Pre-service teachers must demonstrate competency in the eight standards detailed in *2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession* (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2025) and undergo successful professional practice experiences in partnership schools each year of training before they are able to complete their course (Sato & Ma, 2025). As part of meeting these standards, the seven universities and the private training organisations that offer teaching training incorporate bicultural perspectives, teaching reo Māori to a range of proficiencies as well as content around the historical impacts of colonial policy making on ākonga Māori (Sexton, 2024). Despite this, the limited research that has been conducted on the cultural competency of pre-service, graduate and first year teachers demonstrate that they feel unprepared to meet this required competency to support ākonga Māori (Anthony & Kane 2008; Ruawai-Hamilton, 2024). They feel they lack sufficient te reo, understanding of mātauranga Māori, and of Te Tiriti and its implications for teaching. They are unprepared to meet ākonga Māori needs. Such an example of culturally competent teachers would be conducting difficult cultural conversations that arise in the classroom. While difficult, hard discussions support the development of the critically conscious ākonga Ladson-Billings imagines (1995), the necessary engagement to do so can only be achieved when teachers are equipped to conduct them in a safe, culturally affirming way (Matesan, 2025).

McRae and Averill (2019) highlight teacher educators and schools that offer preservice teachers practical experience – commonly referred to as practicums – need to better "demonstrate to student teachers the relevancy for Te Tiriti in contemporary society and political issues affecting education in Aotearoa New Zealand" (p. 172). The student teachers in McRae and Averill's study identified modelling from ITE teachers and mentor teachers as a key enabler in strengthening culturally sustaining practices. As such, a lack of preparation in ITE may provide a barrier for new teachers as they enter the profession and engage in the teaching of Māori-related concepts and content.

2.2.7 Cultural Incompetence and Pākehā Paralysis as a barrier

The teacher population needing to demonstrate this commitment to Te Tiriti and to culturally responsive and sustaining frameworks are predominantly Pākehā teachers, many of whom are women. Recent Ministry of Education statistics report that 71 per cent of all teachers are Pākehā (2024c), and that preponderance grows in the secondary environment with Pākehā making up 80 percent of the workforce (Alansari et al., 2022). Further Ministry data reveals that, unsurprisingly, 76 per cent of New Zealand teachers are female (Ministry of Education, 2024c). The undeniable truth is that ākonga Māori in English-medium schools are largely taught by Pākehā teachers, particularly Pākehā women. These teachers will be acutely aware of the disparities in Māori achievement. They are aware of the research around culturally responsive pedagogy, and the need to incorporate te ao Māori and kaupapa Māori into their instruction, lessons, classroom environment and relationships. They have either gone through initial teacher education where this has been a key feature of their learning (Sexton, 2024) or will likely be undertaking professional development through schools that address it. They will be familiar with *Ka Hikitia,* with *Mana ōrite mō te Mātauranga Māori* and with the *2026 Standards for the Teaching Profession*.

Yet, despite these provisions and a desire broadly to do better by their Māori students, many do not know how. They may feel that they lack adequate knowledge, they may fear making mistakes or causing cultural offense, they may worry about imposter syndrome, or they may be products of systemic issues of understanding that have discouraged deeper engagement (see Amundsen, 2018; Bishop et al., 2014; Healy-Ingram, 2011; Stewart, 2020). Whatever the rationale, this is what Tolich (2002) defines as "Pākehā paralysis": a hesitancy or reluctance by Pākehā to address cultural issues as either "unwilling or unable to think through this political minefield" (p. 168).

Hotere-Barnes (2015), building upon the work of Tolich, defined the phenomena further as:

> Emotional and intellectual difficulties that Pākehā can experience when engaging in social, cultural, economic and political relations with Māori because of a fear of getting it wrong; concern about perpetuating Māori cultural tokenism; negative previous experiences with Māori; a confusion about what the 'right' course of action may be. (p. 41)

This paralysis has led to Pākehā educators opting out of improving the educational system because they see it as too difficult or "not my problem" (p. 42). To achieve Māori educational success, and to move the education system to be more inclusive culturally, however, Pākehā teachers must step up to the plate and actively become involved. This is necessary to overcome the power imbalances inherent in the system such as institutional decision making and resource distribution. As argued by Hotere-Barnes: "Pākehā paralysis can potentially hinder the roles Pākehā can take in positively transforming these monocultural and monological educational systems that reproduce poor learning outcomes for Māori and educational inequity" (p. 42).

Pākehā paralysis affects the ability of teachers to have self-efficacy when working in culturally difficult spaces, functionally self-imposing a barrier. Research finds that teacher notions of self-efficacy are core to their ability to engage in culturally responsive teaching (Lang,

2013). Gibbs argues that teacher perceived self-efficacy can manifest in many forms, such as personal cultural efficacy enacted when teachers have innate belief in their ability to respect, value and encourage students' cultural beliefs, thinking, and actions, and see them as central to their learning (2005). Another form of self-efficacy relevant to this study is collective cultural efficacy. This is a shared belief of teachers' capability as a group to better students' cultural circumstances. Teacher collaboration, in which "practitioners of differentiated abilities" are given "opportunities to discuss debate, observe, and share practices" (Greer, 2012, p. 10), is core to developing effective practice and positively affects student engagement and achievement (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020; Wylie, 2011). Highly efficacious teachers are more likely to "demonstrate resilience, persistence and innovation in their instruction when confronted with challenging teaching situations" (Gibbs, 2005, p. 106) and even small increases in collective teacher efficacy are associated with significant increases in student achievement (see also Margolis & McCabe, 2006). What the literature then emphasises is that Pākehā teachers need sufficient cultural efficacy, perhaps through ITE, or through strengthening of culturally responsive pedagogy to make significant impact in the success of Māori and non-Māori ākonga.

2.3 Subject English, Curricula and Text Selection

2.3.1 Subject English

Subject English has enjoyed a central position in programmes of post primary learning in Aotearoa New Zealand since the first schools were set up by early colonists (Lee & Lee, 2017). From when School Certificate was introduced in 1944 through to the curriculum overhaul of the early 1990s, English has been a compulsory part of the high school programme. Different discourses have defined subject English globally throughout the years (Ward, 2021). The initial understanding of English instruction came out of universal state education in 19th century Britain in which basic skills were championed to offer "technical proficiency" that gave students the best chances at employment. This period was characterised by rote learning, drill-based

instruction that favoured literacy, reading, and writing. Soon after, a model of English education emerged that focused more on the “cultural heritage” of English, in which children were to “learn English culture through literature” (Ward, 2021, p. 51). Favoured literature in the English classroom was used to create national identity and unity, a shared moral understanding of the world, and social cohesion. While this discourse was supposed to be a social levelling tool to provide all students with the same language and skills, it has been widely criticised as privileging middle-class language and culture (Clark, 2001). From the 1960s onwards the “personal growth” model of English has shaped subject English pedagogy, in which individual, student-centred development is prioritised emphasising the relationship between language, personal development and aesthetics of literature.

Rooted in discussions of educational academics at the seminal 1966 Dartmouth Conference, the personal growth discourse was given life by John Dixon in Growth through English (1967) and was further elucidated in 1989 in the Cox Report, a document produced to outline and justify the first English curriculum in the United Kingdom. The personal growth discourse gave students’ language and experiences centre stage for learning, and utilised literature across class and cultural lines (Gibbons, 2017). The canonical literature of the cultural heritage era was still taught in classrooms but was now accompanied by texts that reflected the lives of the diverse students in the room. “Spelling, punctuation, and grammar were taught, as the need arose, in the context of students’ writing” (Ward, 2021, p. 51). It was in the spirit of the personal growth model that the Ministry of Education took a refreshed look at subject English and from this emerged New Zealand’s early 90s curriculum rewrite.

English in the New Curriculum (1994) has clear links with the personal-growth philosophy, and the related “New Curriculum” movement which has its origins in England in the late 80s (Hughson, 2020). The movement quickly swept past its origin post, through to the Western, English-speaking world. It can be referred to by different names in different countries, but these curriculums are characterised by a focus on capabilities and competencies, student-

centred approaches, outputs of learning rather than inputs, and recognising teachers as central agents of change and curriculum making.

This “New Curriculum” movement – and its related focuses – is clearly present in the New Zealand Curriculum and in NCEA English with broad, outcome-focused statements and achievement criteria that give teachers a large amount of autonomy and control over their classrooms (Hughson, 2020, p. 20). Teachers play the “central role in engaging with the question as to what is educationally desirable within each concrete situation” (Biesta, 2012, p. 39), with the ability to “make interpretations in response to the particular needs, interests, and talents of individuals and groups of students in their classes” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 37). Ward (2021) writes that this text selection autonomy – with an absence of texts, authors, and lists of grammar technology – is a key indicator of the personal-growth model. The curriculum, she writes, gives “achievement objectives that students should meet through reading, but no guidance as to what should be read” (p. 56).

2.3.2 Text Selection

Where, historically, Aotearoa New Zealand’s English teachers have been unconstrained by mandated texts or even recommended lists of texts for curriculum levels, this freedom is globally unusual and not afforded to peers in the Australian, British and American education systems. As such, “the New Zealand context provides a case study for adolescent literacy development in English through free teacher text choice” (Hubbard, 2017, p. 78). The curriculum has had an “openness with regard to the choice of literary texts” with teaching practices focused instead on the student at the centre of the learning. “Teachers make deliberate choices with regard to students’ interests and needs and the relevance of what is to be studied” (Ministry of Education, 2012b, para. 1). Although text choice freedom was shored up in recent years with *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994) and *The Senior Curriculum Guide for English* (Ministry of Education, 2012), the 2025 curriculum update now mandates that

teachers of Years 7 to 10 must teach Māori-authored and Pākehā-authored texts (Ministry of Education, 2025b).

The congruence between this openness and the centring of student learning with what students need, and culturally responsive pedagogy, is clear. In fact, in Ladson-Billings original culturally responsive pedagogy research, she draws upon text choice flexibility from one of the teachers in her study to demonstrate what an efficacious teacher looks like. The teacher pulls down a book containing African folk tales to dispel the notions of the class – containing African American students – that every princess had long blonde hair. In conferencing afterward, the teacher remarks that she didn't intend to use the book but responded to the needs of the learners in front of her, that she had a "responsibility" to do so. "The teachers made conscious decisions to be a part of the community from which their students come" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 479). Further to this point, Bacalja and Bliss (2019) argue, writing from an Australian context, that text and text selection are "crucial to understanding the cultures and histories students will encounter through literature, theatre and film". Referencing Misson and Morgan (2006), they assert "texts are not ideologically neutral ... and rarely function isolated from institutional and curricular ideologies that constrain them" (p. 44). Texts also have the power to heal historical trauma, argue Johnson and Sassi (2023). "Healing the historical trauma of Indigenous people can take place through education efforts like the continued passing down of our/their own cultural practices, knowledge, and histories" (Johnson & Sassi, 2023, p. 69). This further strengthens the argument that culturally responsive teaching must include culturally responsive texts that reflect the "cultural practices, knowledge, and histories" of the students they teach to address inequity.

Returning to the Aotearoa New Zealand context, Māori author Patricia Grace (2021) says of subject selection:

> The books we put before children and the stories we tell them reflect different societies and environments through characters, settings, themes, language, dialogue and

> dialects. They affirm and set the social and ethical values of the people they are about. They either give identity to the self because they are familiar, or they help us to know others. (p. 225)

This resonates with the conceptual framework of mirror texts and window texts developed by educator Emily Style in the late 1980s, and the additional concept of sliding doors texts that Rudine Sims Bishops originated by building on Style's work. Style's work argues that curriculum should include knowledge of self (mirrors) and others (windows), and clarification of the known and unknown.

> All students deserve a curriculum which mirrors their own experience back to them, upon occasion – thus validating it in the public world of the school. But curriculum must also insist upon the fresh air of windows into the experience of others – who also need and deserve the public validation of the school curriculum. (Style, 1988, p. 3)

Bishop's "sliding glass doors" are a further attestation in which windows can allow readers to enter imaginary worlds the writer has created. Further, she asserts that with the right lighting – in the right circumstances or with the right teaching – windows can indeed become mirrors.

Grace, an acclaimed author and key feature of New Zealand English classrooms, argues that texts show what is, and is not, important to particular groups of people at a particular time, explain the world, and define relationships with each other, the past, the present, the environments. She highlights consequences of failing to include texts that reflect students' cultural background, specifically that of Māori students.

> Every society has its own stories – old stories, but very importantly, new stories too, that give identity to the self and explain that particular world. If there are no books which tell us about ourselves, but tell us only about others, that makes you invisible in the world of literature. That is dangerous. If there are books and stories about you but they are ones belonging only to the past, it is as though you do not belong in present society. That is dangerous. If there are books about you but they are negative, demeaning, insensitive

> and untrue, that is dangerous. Multiply this by what appears on television, in advertising, teacher attitudes, health services, questionnaires, testing and examinations and in many areas of society, maybe we shouldn't wonder at the low self-esteem, low self-confidence, and therefore the disengagement of many Māori children with education. (2021, pp. 225-226)

Indeed, Grace's contemporary Witi Ihimaera wrote of his own career that his ambition to become a writer was in part fuelled by high school literature he was forced to read that contained "poisonous", "demonic", "demeaning" representations of Māori.

> I said to myself that I was going to write a book about Māori people, not just because it had to be done but because I needed to unpoison the stories already written about Māori; and it would be taught in every classroom in New Zealand, whether they wanted it or not. (2015, p. 352)

Author Whiti Hereaka discusses contemporaneous motivation for writing, and engages with concepts of mirrors, and possible sliding doors in ruminating on who her work is for. Hereaka, who features on the Ministry's suggested text list for the newly enacted curriculum, asserts: "I'm writing first for Māori readers, and that doesn't exclude other readers, but they might have to work a little bit harder or get used to the idea that their experience is not prioritised" (Conroy, n.d., para. 3).

Despite the sentiments of Māori authors, and decades of suggestion and encouragement by curriculum documents to teach Māori texts in high school English programmes, their inclusion in the curriculum has never been mandated and is only now so at teacher insistence. This insistence from teachers for such a mandate may appear at odds with the closely valued freedom around text selection, however it should instead reinforce the essentiality of their inclusion. Teachers' experience and expertise highlight the impacts on teaching and learning in the spaces where such work is not chosen, and so in this instance the

imposed limitation on some aspects of teacher autonomy is valued in the pursuit of a greater social and educational good.

2.3.3 Māori texts in the curriculum

The 1994 authored *English in the New Curriculum* document advocates for adopting more Māori world views into the classroom and, in reviewing the early stages of NCEA, a clear message from the Ministry of Education was sent that "English teachers can no longer ignore (should they want to) the diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds that characterises many New Zealand classrooms" (Locke, 2002, p. 44). However, it was only in 2024 that the first compulsory inclusion of Māori texts into the NCEA system was introduced. Even then, it was done so in one short text used in Assessment Standard 91927, one of the four assessments offered in Level 1 (Year 11) of the curriculum. This external exam asks students to read and analyse the language and ideas of three texts – a poem, a piece of prose and a piece of nonfiction. In 2024, NZQA stated that it would ensure at least one of the three texts used for this exam would be by a Māori author. Figures show there were 70,250 Year 11 students enrolled at secondary schools in 2024 (RNZ, 2025). Many of these students would have sat this assessment. In the New Zealand Qualifications Authority report of the assessment, it asserts that "Many successful candidates were able to incorporate their relevant understanding of te ao Māori and te reo Māori into their responses," further identifying understanding of the Māori concepts of whakapapa and whanaungatanga as helping students to achieve" (NZQA, 2025, p. 4).

In its unpacking of the standard, the Ministry makes an important assumption when it states that yearlong programmes of learning will generally "include texts that give ākonga the opportunity to learn about the unique nature of Aotearoa New Zealand, through the study of Māori voices and perspectives in literature" (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b, para. 4). It goes on to state that when "engaging with a wide range of texts throughout the year, ākonga will learn how

aspects of te ao Māori are woven through Māori literature and how Māori storytelling shapes texts" (para. 9).

This shift in the way we assess identifies that it is clearly now in the interest of all students to understand Māori concepts and read Māori texts, both to enrich the world around them and to prepare them to succeed in the assessments they are expected to undertake.

2.3.4 A refreshed, refreshed curriculum

The English curriculum has been a particularly contested space through the last 3 years, largely due to an ideological shift from a progressive, Te Tiriti-informed framework under the Ardern/Hipkins Labour Governments to the conservative, "knowledge rich" approach of the Luxon National Government. This period has seen an in-progress curriculum refresh halted, completely overhauled, and essentially redesigned in a relatively short space of time. In 2018, a working group formed to explore updating the New Zealand Curriculum, which had last been updated in 2007. A new curriculum was under production by Ardern's Labour government by 2021, and in 2023, *Te Mātaiaho: The Refreshed New Zealand Curriculum* was published in draft form, producing a modernised curriculum with a clear, unabashed, explicit focus on the inclusion of mātauranga Māori. This is best demonstrated in the curriculum's language choice, with the 38-page document using the word "Māori" 65 times as it sets out design and learning sequences. "Te Tiriti" is referenced 38 times, and in the introductory materials, Te Tiriti is described as a "central pillar" of the curriculum.

The document promises active protection of taonga (defined as te reo Māori, tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori), and fair and equitable education processes and outcomes for ākonga Māori and all other ākonga. The statements are broad and aspirational, with a clear progressive focus:

> Transformation within and through education and schooling requires leadership that is courageous, resilient, and productively disruptive – leadership by educators who hold

> themselves accountable to Te Tiriti and its principles, to their communities, and to those ākonga who have historically been left behind or situated on the margins. (p. 8)

The 2023 draft curriculum further indicates commitment to enacting Te Tiriti in using the word "mātauranga" 29 times, promising to "give prominence" to mātauranga, and "incorporate taonga" deliberately with "respectful inclusion".

This progressive, culturalism focus is further seen in the English-specific curriculum documents, with the English purpose statement reading:

> Engaging with mātauranga Māori through the creation and interpretation of texts provides opportunities to strengthen knowledge and understanding of te ao Māori and Māori perspectives, and to play a part in shaping a bicultural Aotearoa (p. 32).

The associated refreshed *English Learning Matrix* (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b) states students across all levels of the schooling system need to have significant exploration of "how Māori creators provide an important perspective on living and participating in Aotearoa New Zealand and the world, and how the study of Māori texts plays a role in the process of honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi" as well as appreciate "how the English language in Aotearoa New Zealand is unique and includes elements of te reo Māori" (p. 1).

Despite the focus on mātauranga Māori, the references to text selection are still vague. The curriculum mentions texts that foster understanding Māori "perspectives", and the matrix identifies "Māori texts", but does not define them. The expectations for kaiako are unclear and the possible interpretations are varied, leaving teachers with little guidance or direction.

This draft curriculum and the associated matrix were only briefly in place. In the wake of the newly installed Luxon National government in October of 2023, new Education Minister Erica Stanford formed a second Ministerial Advisory Group to review the curriculum once again, halting the work already in progress. After further redesigning and further feedback, the Ministry released a redrafted 24-page *The New Zealand Curriculum Te Mātaiaho* in October 2025. An additional 64 pages of an English curriculum came into effect for Years 0 through 10 in January

of 2026, incorporating four “phases” of learning. The final phase for Years 11 to 13 is yet to be released.

The tenor of this updated draft curriculum *The New Zealand Curriculum Te Mātaiaho* is markedly different to its predecessor. Across its 24 pages, there are a sparse 8 uses of the word “Māori” in comparison to the 65 in the 2023 draft. The phrase “Te Tiriti” is used 2 times in comparison to the 38 of the former document, and worth noting is a small but impactful shift in the way Te Tiriti is included; in the 2023 curriculum draft Te Tiriti o Waitangi was referenced before using the English translation The Treaty of Waitangi whereas in the 2025 draft curriculum these have been swapped and the English comes before the Māori. Similarly, Labour’s draft foregrounded Māori by calling the curriculum *Te Mātaiaho: The Refreshed New Zealand Curriculum*, whereas the new document inverts this, calling it *The New Zealand Curriculum Te Mātaiaho*. Finally, the word “mātauranga” is used just once in the 2025 document, reading that: “Schools and kura, working with hapū and iwi, may choose to include local mātauranga in their teaching and learning programmes” (p. 5). The lone use of the word, coupled with the hesitant modal verb of “may”, underscores the curriculum’s, and the Ministry’s, change of heart around the centring of mātauranga Māori in the education system. Te Tiriti is deprioritised, no longer a central pillar of design, and mātauranga is no longer deliberately included nor given prominence.

Despite this clear reneging of Māori knowledge inclusion in the 2025 draft curriculum, the finalised English curriculum provides a significant and pertinent change to Māori *text* inclusion. It states that English programmes “must” include texts by Māori authors in Year 7 through 10. In the wake of an updated draft English curriculum released in March of 2025 to incorporate the work of Stanford’s Ministerial Advisory Group, feedback from the teaching community quickly pointed out the proposed refresh lacked Māori voice. In a document entitled *What You Told Us and How We Responded English Years 7-10*, released in October 2025 alongside the finalised English curriculum, the Ministry of Education openly addresses these

criticisms and the feedback received. One such submission by an educator reads “texts by ‘New Zealand’ authors does not specifically refer to Māori writers, and it should” (p. 7). The Ministry writes that “many respondents” called for more “Māori authors, mātauranga Māori, and clearer references to Te Tiriti o Waitangi” in the curriculum. The refresh was seen as “too focused on Western traditions, with limited space for Indigenous perspectives and oral storytelling” (p. 7).

While *The New Zealand Curriculum Te Mātaiaho* and its associated English Curriculum still fail to meaningfully refer to Te Tiriti and mātauranga as the criticism highlights, a new clause had been added to “required texts” for Phase 3 (Years 7 and 8) and Phase 4 (Years 9 and 10) of the curriculum, reading:

> Teachers should ensure that students experience historical and contemporary texts that are widely regarded as high quality. These must include … texts by a range of authors representative of New Zealand’s rich bicultural (both Māori and Pākehā) and multicultural literary heritage. (pp. 42, 53)

This sentence could be read in a cursory manner. It is repeated twice in the 64-page English document, and the structure of the sentence is ambiguous: is it that the texts must by Māori or that the texts must be representative of Māori? However, in the supplementary document addressing the feedback, the ministry states they have “expanded text requirements” which implies that the texts themselves must have Māori authors. To further clarify, this researcher sought information from the Ministry of Education about this dense, opaque clause. In response, the New Zealand Curriculum Refresh Team provided the following:

> To clarify, the clause is intended to ensure that students engage with texts by Māori authors, alongside authors from Aotearoa New Zealand’s wider bicultural and multicultural literary landscape. The reference to “authors representative of New Zealand’s rich bicultural (both Māori and Pākehā) and multicultural literary heritage” signals that the authorship itself matters, not only the themes or cultural content of the text. Māori literature is grounded in mātauranga Māori, whakapapa, reo, and lived

> experience. For this reason, the curriculum explicitly expects that text selections will include works created by Māori writers, ensuring students encounter authentic Māori voices and viewpoints. Teachers must also include texts written by Pākehā and other authors that reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's diverse cultural heritage.

While this clarification does help to further explain the curriculum document, the curriculum itself fails to provide such clarity. It does not mention Māori perspectives, te ao Māori or Māori contexts, and so while a firm edict on Māori-authored inclusion, once again the texts selected are left open to wide and varied interpretation. On the one hand, this affirms again a tradition of teacher autonomy and expertise, but on the other, it creates space for ineffective, or worse, harmful choices to be made.

2.3.5 Defining Māori Texts

But what even is a Māori text? This is an ongoing conversation with no easy answers. Makereti (2019) writes that Māori are often overlooked as having not had a literature tradition because Māori literature is not often recognised as "literature". "We've been defining our literature in Eurocentric terms, as our education system dictates, rather than defining it on our terms" (para. 28)

Māori literature is, therefore, hard to define because it depends on the criteria being considered, and who came up with the criteria in the first place. Makereti writes that in a Mana magazine article in 2014, it was asserted that before Ihimaera "published his first novel in 1973, there was no Māori literary tradition" (2019, para. 27). This is inaccurate and wipes from history Māori writers such as Jacquie Sturm (Millar, 2018) who was prolific in the 1960s, writing long before the emergence of Ihimaera in the 1970s. Indeed, Ihimaera himself details in his memoir *Native Son* (2019) the many Māori writers and their texts that existed before, and therefore influenced, him, including Sturm and her fellow short story writers Arapera Blank who won the Katherine Mansfield Memorial Award in 1959, Patricia Grace, and Kāterina Te Heikōkō Mataira.

The assertion that Ihimaera is the “first” is insidious in that it privileges literature as, firstly only that of the novel, and, secondly and more ethnocentrically, only a “written tradition”, erasing oral literary traditions that thrived within Māori communities before the arrival of the coloniser (Hura, 2018). Matuku (2017) further considers the term of Māori literature and its classifiers. She writes: “The consensus seems to be that if you are a Māori writer, anything you write becomes part of the canon of Māori literature” (para. 15). This can be seen as a privilege; Matuku argues that it is an invitation or “permission slip” to cast off the suppression of conforming to widely held beliefs of what literature is. Māori novelist and short story writer Patricia Grace (2021) also finds freedom in that:

> The rest of the world may be out there, but our world is where we are. We can write our own themes, our own characters, our own language. We can change the form of the novel, or create a new form, if we want to...” (pp. 200-201)

But this loose definition is also possibly problematic. Steph Matuku asks, “If no one can define exactly what makes a Māori story Māori, how can anyone put limits on it?” (para. 18). Alice Te Punga Somerville (2021) writes that understanding Māori texts deeply is part of how Māori unlock meaning. “Drawing on metaphors and aesthetic theories from mātauranga Māori can provide us with ways to engage with Māori texts that we might not have gotten to through other pathways” (para. 94). Māori world views on English language also push back against “the colonial story that says contemporary (or maybe post-contact) cultural production is a departure from, or proof of destruction of, Māori worlds.” Returning to Grace (2021), she advocates that while “aspects of our culture will be unknown to the rest of the world”, Māori writers should not need to “encumber” their work with “glossaries, italics, footnotes, asides, explanatory paragraphs disguised as plot, if we judge best not to”(p. 200).

Further to the clear relevance to all students that Māori texts now hold for engagement and achievement is the power these texts have to shape discourse around Māori. The curriculum is "not merely responsive to the internal workings of the education system but

constitutes potentially an important source for understanding the more general structures of and relationships in society as a whole" (McCulloch, 1992, p. 10). How Māori are viewed by the Crown and society at large, and how mātauranga Māori is viewed, can covertly and overtly be discerned by the way Māori are considered and engaged in policy shaping. The current political climate in New Zealand leaves educators in a state of uncertainty. The previous Labour Government clearly signalled the importance of Te Tiriti, of culturally responsive pedagogy, and of Mana ōrite through the NCEA Curriculum Change. However, it is clear in reviewing *The New Zealand Curriculum Te Mātaiaho* that the current National government does not seem to be as committed to this vision of education. As such, teachers are caught in the crosshairs; they are charged with enacting the curriculum as is written which deprioritises mātauranga in a “knowledge-rich” reimagining, but they also see the essentiality of centring and emphasising mātauranga for student achievement. Teachers must then find a way to navigate these competing pressures in order to meet professional obligations, as well as the needs of their learners.

2.4 Summary

This review contextualises the state of Māori education in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the practices and historical factors that have led Māori students to a place of inequity within the current education system. It then unpacks one of the most crucial pedagogical shifts for teachers in combating this inequity: enacting culturally responsive pedagogy. Key literature on culturally responsive pedagogy and policy highlights what supports currently exist for Pākehā teachers to effectively teach ākonga Māori such as *Te Kotahitanga* and its findings but also finds some criticisms for these documents such as in Tātaiako which does not provide sufficient guidance at times. Also explored are barriers for kaiako, such as a lack of preparation for the cultural dimension of teaching in Initial Teacher Education programmes, and subsequent perceived cultural incompetency that induces Pākehā paralysis within kaiako.

The focus then narrows to the high school English classroom, contextualising subject English and its history, and how culturally responsive pedagogy is viewed specifically in this space. Further potential barriers are then explored: historically broad guidelines around Māori text inclusions, unclear definitions the Māori text itself, and political upheavals that use education as a policy football leading to constant curriculum changes that abruptly alter the focus and scope of Māori text inclusion.

This sets the stage for the research itself. In a subject area undergoing a great amount of change and wading through areas of ambiguity, and with the cultural legacy of denigrated Māori knowledge, the question must be asked: what are Pākehā teacher attitudes, perceptions and experiences when teaching Māori texts? With a legacy of inequitable outcomes from historical dispossession, and concerns about preparation in ITEs, what barriers currently exist? And finally, with culturally responsive pedagogy and decolonising policies now dominating the conversation of effective teaching, what supports are in place to help these teachers teach Māori texts well?

Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology and theory underpinning the approach to the research is discussed, as well as specific methods undertaken in the research and analysis. This research aims to explore how Pākehā high school English teachers are teaching Māori texts. More specifically, it asks:

1. What are Pākehā teachers' experiences and perspectives on teaching Māori texts in English classrooms?
2. What strategies do Pākehā teachers employ to incorporate Māori texts in English classrooms, and what are the barriers and facilitators influencing their practice?

These questions centre the investigation of teacher experience by asking teachers to describe, explain, analyse and explore their role in the classroom to generate insights about the way Māori texts are taught. The questions have intentionally been designed with language that is neutral and open, avoiding deficit positioning or moral judgements that allows the teachers to shape the meaning, as is consistent with the interpretive and reflective ontology and epistemology of the study which will be explored in this chapter.

Teachers' practical experiences, their personal understandings in belief, perceptions and values, and the formalised education they have undergone has shaped the knowledge they hold – the subject content, their interpretation of the content, the way they approach teaching it and their general pedagogical approach – and how they apply this knowledge to teaching practice (Yap & Gurney, 2023). This ideology informs the framework of 'personal practical knowledge'. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) propose an epistemological stance in which teachers are knowing and knowledgeable and grounded in practical experience. Within this stance, knowledge is seen as being "imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of, a person's experiential history, both

professional and personal" (Clandinin, 1985, p. 362). As such, the framework proposes teacher knowing as best captured narratively in "the stories teachers live, tell, retell, and relive in their classrooms" (Ross & Chan, 2016, p. 3). In agreement, this research centres on storytelling not only as a data collection tool, but also as a mode of learning and understanding. The participants are seen as being knowing and knowledgeable. They have stories, or pūrākau, to "tell, retell, and relive" and these shared pūrākau will help provide insights with which to explore the research questions.

3.1.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm explains "what the researcher believes reality is, how they think knowledge can be understood, and what they value in research" (Pretorius, 2024, p. 2698.) Ontology details the researcher's perceived "structure of reality" (Nguyen & Chia, 2023, p. 215), clarifying and explaining the nature of existence. Epistemology then looks at how we know what we know; it considers "the nature of knowledge and the processes through which we come to understand it." The ontology, or the way of knowing what we know, underpinning this research is relativism, arguing that knowledge is multiple and situated. In this paradigm, reality is not viewed as objective and independent but something that is "relative": constructed through "human thought, interactions, and social processes" (Pretorius, p. 2704). Knowledge, in this research, is seen as specific and true to the individual, shaped by social contexts, historical moments, and collective practices, which constantly evolve as societal values and beliefs shift.

Interpretivism is the epistemology – or understanding of how we come to know what we know – that this research employs. Interpretivism argues that experiences are shaped by context and power, and that interpretation is both flexible and always in flux. Understanding and knowing is culturally derived and historically situated (Moon & Blackman, 2014, p. 1169). Interpretivism argues that knowledge is subjective – that we cannot ever fully understand another person's experience objectively – but we can try to make sense of it, interpret it and

make meaning from it (Blaikie & Priest, 2017; Omodan, 2024). Coming to research in this manner allows researchers to see the diversity of the human experience and validate that there are multiple, equally true realities coexisting at any one time based on the perspectives of the participants involved. Like other epistemologies, interpretivism acknowledges the role of the researcher and how it may influence the research in the dynamic relationship between the researcher and the participant. It acknowledges that transmission of information is never one way in relational dynamics. However, interpretivism is clear that the central focus is on understanding and interpreting the values, meanings, and experiences that participants attach to their own experiences rather than that of the researcher (Pretorius, 2024, p. 2705). Interpretivism lends itself well to this study because the research seeks to understand teachers experiences of teaching Māori texts and how they individually make meaning in their teaching and learning processes.

3.1.2 Kaupapa Māori-informed approach

I am a Pākehā researcher looking at Māori texts, which reflect Māori thought and Māori identity. These texts are taonga (highly prized resource or object/s) of tangata whenua, and as such they are protected by Te Tiriti. Because my research relates to taonga Māori, and the worldview of Māori, I see it incumbent to treat my research, and its participants, with cultural respect to fulfil my obligations as tangata Tiriti (people of the treaty). As such, the research needs to reflect kaupapa Māori values. Early in the research process I grappled with what exactly this meant, not in such a dissimilar way to the experience of my participants in considering their own responsibilities. What were my obligations here? What is the ethical thing to do? Kaupapa Māori research belongs to Māori researchers working by, with, and for Māori. As a Pākehā researcher exclusively talking to Pākehā participants, this is not something I can claim applies to my project or to the learning that comes of it. However, the work can and should be kaupapa Māori-informed, grounded in the ethical imperative to honour mātauranga Māori, to

take seriously my responsibility as tangata Tiriti, and operate in a way that challenges epistemic injustice, not shying away from the complex political and historical dimensions that impact the research. As such, I see this research as being “Māori responsive” research (Cram & Adcock, 2023, p. 56) supporting an agenda of transformation and Tiriti-honouring for Aotearoa.

For this research, in practice, it means applying Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s approach to defining research conduct and the seven cultural values she reflects on in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2021). Cram and Adcock’s work (2023) helped to focus my understanding and approach to Smith’s work, specifically helping me to create a clear framework in my head of concepts and application that were particularly important to me such as *Kia tupato* – being careful of assumptions in the research process, *Manaaki ki te tangata* – hosting the participants by sharing and being generous through methods and an interpretive framework that allows people’s voices to be heard, and *Kaua e takahia te mana o te tangata* – not undermining dignity or trampling on the status of my participants by treating everyone with dignity and respect through small put powerful actions like letting participants decide where to meet, and what they will share (Cram & Adcock, 2023).

3.2 Research Methods

This research takes a qualitative approach, meaning it focuses on presenting or interpreting people's views, interactions or values through words or text to generate insight in “issue, process, experience or a social group” (Meyer & Meissel, 2023, p. 63). Qualitative research is also socially, historically and culturally situated, and can interact and dialogue with other research approaches such as, indigenous and Kaupapa Māori research methodologies. Qualitative research emphasises “people’s perspectives at the heart of the research”, recognising that there are “multiple dimensions and perspectives and that the social world is fluid, not static” (Meyer & Meissel, 2023, p. 65). This is consistent with the interpretivist ontology and the relativist epistemology with which this research is grounded. Additionally, within

qualitative research, respectful relationship building between the participants and the researcher is encouraged, which for me is especially important in honouring Kaupapa Māori values as was discussed in the previous section.

3.2.1 Selection Criteria

The selection criteria for participants relied on purposive sampling, in which the participants' experience was considered in relation to the research questions. Purposive sampling researchers deliberately select participants based on their experience, specific knowledge base or concurrence with a pre-set criteria as it produces deep insights and rich, relevant data to illuminate the phenomena at the centre of the research (Tajik et al., 2024). To have a range of voices and experiences, I interviewed six from different schools within the Waikato area. The specific criteria I used were teachers who had taught a Māori text in a Year 9 to 13 English classroom within the last two years. I specifically wanted voices from different socioeconomic and sociocultural communities. Initially, I sought non-Māori teachers, but due to the demographic of English teachers, my respondents were exclusively Pākehā. These interviews were offered–to-face to help create trust between myself and the participant and were audio recorded so as to not interrupt the discussion.

3.2.2 Participants

For this project, I interviewed six teachers from six different urban schools across the Waikato region. As my research finding are presented as narrative case studies (covered in the next section), more information about each of the participants and their experiences can be found in Chapter Four. I invited participants initially through the Waikato English Language Teacher's Association Facebook page, and the NZ English Teachers Facebook page, and then contacted heads of faculty as schools around the Waikato region when I had a limited response to the call out. Each participant contacted me to participate in the research, and the interviews were then all conducted in face-to-face settings. Of the six participants in the research, three

identified as female, one as non-binary and two as male. Three of the teachers worked at special character schools with Christian theology included in the instruction of the school, while three worked at public schools. Three of the teachers worked at single-sex schools and three were worked at co-educational institutions. One of the teachers had been working as a teacher for over 40 years, one had 30 years of experiences, two had been working for between 10 and 20 years, one was approaching 10 years of experience, and one had been in the classroom for just over five years. All identified as Pākehā.

3.2.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

My own personal background is as a journalist, and because of this grounding, I feel most comfortable working within semi-structured interviews as a collection method. I see semi-structured interviews as pairing with interpretivism, leaving "open the opportunity to discover things as the research progresses" (Willis, 2007, p. 37). Semi-structured interviews are a "powerful tool" (Rabionet, 2011, p. 563) as they give researchers flexibility to capture participant voice and how they personally make meaning out of their lived experiences. Researchers are able to narrow down areas of exploration, opening the conversation with the participant with broad questions that are consistent across the range of participants but that can then elicit further conversation in which participant stories can evolve organically. For my research, I constructed a list of open-ended questions grouped in five different sections that allowed flexibility to either focus on some questions with more granularity or to diverge and follow further points of interest as the interviews progressed. The five sections that were covered in the interviews were constructed with the core questions of this research in mind, namely:

- The perception of the importance of Māori texts
- The preparation of, and perceptions of, confidence in teaching Māori texts
- The primary challenges faced when teaching Māori texts
- The strategies and resources used when teaching Māori texts

- Engagement with tikanga and Māori community

Each section had “touchstone” questions that were consistently asked, whereas there were other questions that I either used or omitted in some from certain sections based on the direction and depth of the discussion. These touchstone questions were useful in the analysis as they provided overlapping points of concentration that uncovered similarities philosophically and pedagogically for the participants. For example, in the initial section the first question I asked was: “How would you define a Māori text?” While some conversations then further refined aspects of the question, having every participant engage with the question was useful as a starting point to each conversation, and having these touchstone questions brought conversations that each diverged away at times from the set questions – which was useful for colour and context – back into the focus of the research.

The participants had control over the location of the interview to ensure they felt comfortable. One conversation was conducted in the participant’s home, one was held at a library, three in local coffee shops (this provided some challenges in transcription) and one in the participant’s classroom. Each conversation began with confirming the participants’ comfort and consent of my recording, and then the participant shared information about themselves and their backgrounds. This was left as open ended as possible to see what they thought was relevant in framing their experiences as a teacher of Māori texts. Following this introduction, questions were asked in five sections with the focus of my five key areas. Over time, there was a shift in the focus of the questions I used in the interviews, particularly in the section of questions that asked about strategies and strengths, as some of the specific touchstone questions on the sheet led to repetitive answers. I instead asked questions that were more provocative or anticipatory of eliciting of deep-seated beliefs, such as “Should Māori texts be compulsory? Why or why not?” Each interview on average lasted about one hour.

3.2.4 Narrative Inquiry

Once the initial research was completed, I settled on the use of narrative case studies of the participants to present the information and explore the data through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Narrative case studies combine two research instruments to create complex and compelling depictions of the data that has been collected in research. Case studies are “stories told for the purpose of understanding and learning” (Brandell & Varkas, 2001, p. 294), capturing essential meanings and qualities of a discrete case – for my research this equates to that of a single teacher’s experience – that would possibly not be able to be conveyed through other methodologies. This pairs cleanly with narrative inquiry, “the study of experience as story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375) which considers the ways humans experience the world. Applying a narrative framework to case studies allows extensive examination of an “individual unit”, defining environmental contexts for multiple variables applying to the case to be investigated. Brandell and Varkas (2001) contend that “the narrative case study permits the researcher to ‘capture’ exceedingly complex case situations, allowing for a considerable degree of detail and richness of understanding” (p. 298). In my attempting to do this, I use narrative case studies to encapsulate the many factors that influence the teacher’s experience of teaching.

In my findings, I wanted to capture the richness of each participant or case, complexly illustrating the participant beyond a traditional linear data set. To do this, I use narrative case studies in the follow way:

- I create a bounded case, consistent with case studies, in which I present the pūrākau of a single teacher, in a single school, with a specific teaching history.
- I give each case contextual grounding, detailing the background of the teacher and the school they currently operate in, consistent with case study.

- I present the majority of the case in narrative episodes, rather than through the lens of summaries, in which the participant describes and then interprets their experiences through their own lens, consistent with narrative inquiry.
- These narrative episodes are in the participant's voice, foregrounding their words and experiences with direct speech to preserve as much of the intention and meaning behind the data as possible.

The way in which a participant's lived story is presented along the bounded case makes a narrative case study best fit the form of this research. It is true that as an English teacher, and a former journalist, conducting research into English teachers and their engagement with story and pūrākau within the classroom that I think the representation of the research should complement the subject matter with nuance, colour and texture.

When it comes to the form and complexities of narrative research, I acknowledge the limitations and potential biases. I am as a researcher making crucial decisions about that which is illuminated and that which is omitted. I have tried to keep the accounts as faithful as I possibly could to represent the stories shared with me to answer this research question. I take to solace in Braun and Clarke's admonition and hope when they wrote that the researcher is "a situated, insight-bringing, integral component of the analysis" (2021, p. 10). I am not a neutral conduit, I bring with me my own assumptions, expectations and experiences, and I acknowledge it shapes and informs my research. To acknowledge this, I try to retain the words of the teachers themselves, blending their shared pūrākau with my own "situated" and "insight-bringing" response and analysis in a case study form. My hope is this adds colour, context and complexity to give further nuance to the experiences and perspectives of the six participants.

3.2.5 Thematic Analysis

In thematic analysis, qualitative data is coded and then combined into overarching large-scale ideas that summarise the findings of the semi structured interviews coherently and

meaningfully. Thematic analysis is “a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 78). Researchers look for similarities and differences in the data set to explore more complex patterns (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021) and then consider them in making an argument that addresses the research questions in their final analysis report. Thematic analysis allows researchers to use their judgement in determining the themes, from the number of themes they identify and define, to how they are presented and discussed in the final analysis report.

Thematic analysis can summarise key learnings from a large amount of data, and is able to then offer vivid, rich, and detailed accounts of the data set, as well as highlighting similarities and differences and garnering unanticipated insights. This more descriptive product of thematic analysis is also in turn more accessible for those reading, applying and building upon the findings of the research.

I used Braun and Clarke's six-phase process to the thematic analysis. First, I familiarised myself with the data set through transcribing the interviews, reading and re-reading each transcription, and noting down ideas that emerged in the initial stages of looking at the data. I did this manually on A3 sized print outs of the transcripts that had been bulldog-clipped together with a wide margin to allow notes to be written in and around the data.

Next, the data was coded. Interesting aspects of the interviews were identified and labelled, organised into meaningful groups under one- or two-word labels such as “strengths” or “experiences”. I did this initially on the A3 sheets of paper before moving into computer documents, where I created tables of the codes and quotes that fit the code label.

Once the initial coding was complete, the third phase was searching for themes, specifically similarities and differences in the interview data which was then collated into broader connecting areas such as “colleagues” and “perceptions”. I found that the ordered questions in my semi-structured interviews provided a good basis as I looked at what themes were

consistent as I read through and compared the data by questions, which provide overlapping data points.

It is important to note that at this point in the analysis the researcher is not a passive participant waiting quietly for themes to ‘emerge’ without doing any active work to ‘find’ them. Research is not a neutral endeavour (Sikes, 2006), and we make decisions in what themes we identify, select and report (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Given this starting position of non-neutrality, I tried to acknowledge possible bias, approaching the data with an open mind to avoid any preconceived conclusions.

This was specifically relevant to the fourth phase, which was reviewing the themes. At this point, themes are refined by either cutting or collapsing together themes unsupported by the data. Braun and Clarke assert data should “cohere together meaningfully”, with “clear and identifiable distinctions” between themes (p. 91). In this phase, I found that some themes were too broad and needed to be surgically separated, such as in the theme “pedagogy” which incorporated too many ideas and was not refined enough. Others were not significant to be considered themes in their own right and needed to be “collapsed” together, such as the theme of “public perception” which was collapsed into the “teacher anxieties” theme.

The fifth phase was naming the themes, in which they needed to be definable in a few sentences. This phase was perhaps the most complicated for my research, as coming up with clear, defined boundaries was challenging. Some were easier than others, such as “Teacher Applied Definitions of the Māori Text”, while what became “Culturally Responsive Practices of Vulnerability and Resilience” took time to be named.

The final phase of the process was producing the final report in which I summarise the findings in narrative case studies, supporting each narrative with quotes from the data set (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I opted to lean into a journalistic style of reporting, providing colour and context from the world that surrounded the interviews – environment, history, interaction – but wanted to highlight and prioritise actual quotes from the interviews as much as

possible to preserve meaning and voice. I then provide analysis in Chapter 5 – Discussion, relating back overall to the research questions and the literature that has been explored. This analysis is grounded in the data, but should, if I have done my job thoroughly, “go beyond the surface level of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.2.6 Ethical Considerations

Wellington (2000) writes: “ethical considerations outweigh all others” (p. 54). In preparing my research proposal to present to the university, I considered as impartially and thoroughly as I could, what I could do to conduct the research and produce its finding in as ethical a way as possible. To do so, the University of Waikato Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulation was fully adhered to.

Voluntary Participation

My position as a teacher within the Waikato region creates a potential power imbalance with prospective participants. I considered whether teachers might feel pressure to participate due to a perceived obligation to support a colleague, a fear of missing out on future opportunities, or the general hierarchical dynamics within the teaching profession. To address this, I explicitly and repeatedly emphasised in recruitment materials (emails, information sheet, consent form, and conversations) that participation is entirely voluntary and that declining or withdrawing would have no negative consequences.

Informed Consent

I ensured informed consent by explaining the nature of the research in my initial participant invitation materials, and in an initial email with each participant in which I sent a participant information sheet and a participant agreement and consent form. In the case of one participant, I had an initial phone call to explain my research in more detail before sending the information. I asked each participant if they wanted any further information or explanation, or if they had questions before I scheduled an in-person interview with them. Once they had read

and agreed to the terms, we scheduled our interview where paperwork was signed and a further opportunity to ask any further questions and get any further clarification was given before the interview commenced.

The participant information sheet included understanding of:

- voluntary participation
- consent to audio-recording
- the right to read their transcript
- the right of withdrawal within two weeks of the data collection
- how the data would be stored
- consent to pseudonym, which is further detailed in the following section
- right to access research findings,
- understanding that anonymity cannot be guaranteed, as is discussed below.

Anonymity

The small size of the Waikato English teaching community means that even with pseudonyms and anonymised data, participants might be identifiable. This could lead to self-censorship or even unintentional breaches of confidentiality. To mitigate this and ensure confidentiality, I presented findings in aggregated form where possible, such as in detailing information in the participants' section above. I have avoided using quotes or anecdotes that could identify participants, and used substitution of identifying factors such as school names, staff names, or school specific language (such as if the students were boys or girls, or professional development initiatives) where it would have potentially revealed further identifying information. I was transparent with participants about the inherent limitations of anonymity in such a close-knit community, explaining that while I could take every precaution, complete anonymity could not be guaranteed. Two of the participants waived their right to anonymity, but regardless I have kept their information private. I assigned each participant a New Zealand bird

as a pseudonym to protect their identity. I prefer to use the New Zealand birds rather than codes to reflect the grounded nature of this research in New Zealand, removing the coldness and impersonal nature of codes that can detract from the fact that the stories I am collecting are based on human experience. Birds do not hold connotations in the way that human pseudonyms may do.

Confidentiality

Because of the small network of teachers in the Waikato area, there does inherently exist, between researcher and the participants, an established familiarity. This may have made the participants feel some sense of pressure or judgement as there was the possibility that the things they shared could somehow be relayed to people that we both know or are familiar with – such as their colleagues or heads of faculty. It was important to establish this as a legitimate concern at the beginning of the process and discuss that there would be absolutely no communication with anybody outside of the study about what they shared, that anything included in the publishing of the research will be anonymised to ensure their privacy and confidentiality, and that they had the right to view the transcripts of what had been said so they were aware of this information in the form that it could potentially be published.

Some of my interviews took longer than expected to transcribe. As such, in keeping with the terms of my participant sheet, I allowed two weeks from receiving the interview transcript to make any amendments. Some participants waived the right to see and query the transcript entirely. The interview transcripts were returned to the participants who requested to see them to allow them to check for accuracy and to relay any concerns, and then the interview recordings were deleted. The digital transcriptions transcripts were saved under the pseudonyms of the participants and documents that contained any identifying information were also erased.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the narrative case studies of the six participants. They are presented as six separate journeys of exploration about power, positionality, pedagogy, and formative personal experiences. While largely represented in linear fashion from the flow of conversation, at times the narratives have been reordered slightly to create a more consistent flow of ideas in a journalistic style. Ums, ahhs, pauses, and hesitations in sentences are seen in the reported data only when they add to the meaning of the participants' recounts. In representing them, I have endeavoured to preserve the pūrākau in facsimile. As such I do not interpret or discuss these findings in this chapter. I hope these accounts can resonate with readers in some way.

Each interview was around one hour in length, and the interview has been "restoried" or reorganised by key elements (Cresswell, 2007) in the following narratives to try to capture the core messages and experiences each teacher shared. Each teacher also has a unique pseudonym of a native New Zealand bird. I asked the teachers in the one-on-one interviews if there was a bird they would most like to be represented by and four of the six participants selected their own bird. The remaining two pseudonyms were randomly assigned. With three of the participants working at co-educational schools, I have removed the use of gendered students such as 'boys' or 'girls' from the narratives and replaced them with 'students' to further protect anonymity.

4.2 Tūī's Pūrākau

Tūī teaches purely English. A Pākehā teacher in her early 50s, she has been at the same kura (school) for over two decades, eventually becoming the head of faculty about 10 years ago. She grew up in rural King Country, in areas of high Māori population, but despite this, she can't remember engaging with te ao Māori at all through her schooling, never learning

waiata or kupu Māori, even into her high school years. This is something that seems to perturb her now. She shares this in an incredulous manner, both confused at how this could be possible but also resigned to accept the attitude of education in the era in which she was raised.

When asked if she ever read a Māori text as part of her learning, her response is a quick, resounding no before she faintly recalls one text – Witi Ihimaera's short story "The Escalator" (Ihimaera, 1977) – and a fleeting memory of a school trip to see Bruce Mason's 1956 play *The Pohutukawa Tree* in Auckland. The Ihimaera text is now out of print, and while Bruce Mason's work deals with Māori characters and their intersection with the Pākehā world, Mason himself is not Māori. Tūī also struggles to recall any Māori texts being discussed at teachers' college, nor does she believe the teaching of Māori texts was ever really addressed:

> It was probably touched on? But I don't think there was any requirement for them to cover – they may have thrown a couple of poems at us, but I don't remember doing anything about teaching Māori texts, at all … I don't think it was covered at all.

She began teaching in an era of what she feels was apathy to Māori texts. Māori texts were "thrown" her way by more experienced teachers but teaching them intentionally wasn't something that was actively thought about. "I can tell you we were doing *Pounamu, Pounamu* ... we probably did "A Game of Cards" with our Year 10s and that probably would have been the limit that we would have done." It was a decade into her career when Māori texts and their importance began to register, a slow process that relied on external pressures from ERO reviews and increasing professional development opportunities. This shifting attitude coincided with more explicit requirements to hold schools accountable for priority learners and this started to create a sense of awareness that quickly developed for Tūī.

Tūī defines Māori texts as those primarily written by Māori authors but does see space to include those written by non-Māori that deal with Māori issues, as with Bruce Mason's *The Pohutukawa Tree* that she earlier cited. For instance, Huntly-based Pākehā writer Falstaff Dowling-Mitchell's text *White Lies, Māori Legends and Fairytales* (2019) was referenced as a

Māori text being taught to Year 9 students. Tūī talks extensively about the texts that she has engaged with or seen taught at her kura, many of which are short texts – poems or short stories by Patricia Grace, Witi Ihimaera, and Hone Tuwhare rather than extended texts such as novels or plays. When talking specifically about her own teaching, she references a Year 13 unit around colonisation in which she teaches Pasifika writer Tusiata Avia's *The Savage Coloniser Book* (2020). Texts themselves are a key barrier for Tūī – specifically the access through budget constraints. She notes that student engagement tends to be lower for extended texts than short texts. Because of this, she weighs up whether investing in a class set of extended texts is worth the hit to the faculty's budget, if it will engage students enough to be used more than once. Additional to this is a structural barrier with the amount of time allocated to teach her students every week. While she finds the school supportive of mātauranga Māori in general, only three hours of time is allocated for juniors weekly, leaving her scrambling to do the basics and very little time left to focus on any kinds of texts: "If I could do more I would do more but I just – it's not enough."

Tūī makes Māori text selections in concert with the concept of "mirror texts" and "window texts", drawing upon the work of Emily Style in the 1980s. "The kids have an opportunity to see themselves reflected in the texts but also a chance to see outside, through the window and see a bigger world." However, she finds there is a resistance in part to mirror texts, noting ākonga are more interested in "seeing beyond themselves". Despite this, she feels the students engage more genuinely with New Zealand and Māori texts than they have in the past:

> Probably 10 years ago I probably would have had more kids saying, oh why are we learning this Māori stuff, you know, but the kids ... because we're seeing the effects of the shifts now, and I think there's been a huge shift and much more of an acknowledgement of the importance of mātauranga Māori ... they're more open to it.

The best supports Tūī has found in her decade long journey is being able to talk to other people and get either encouragement, interest or support. Additional to that is the He Papa

Tikanga course completed through Te Wānanga O Aotearoa, and TupuOra, which allowed Tūī to talk to other teachers across levels and subjects: “[h]earing what they were doing, hearing what they have taught was really useful”. The government’s recent defunding of this programme is something she views with concern:

> that course I did, that was a good entry way in and if you're not having that, then how are we helping the teachers who are my age, older, who have not had that same grounding that people who are younger than me had when they went to school.

Tūī also participates in professional development offered by the New Zealand Association of Teachers of English (NZATE) where she can discuss challenges with other teachers. David Schaumann’s Secondary English Teachers Mailing List, a paid for service developed after the once free English ListServ forum for high school teachers was defunded by the Ministry of Education in 2023, also provides support. Tūī collaborates with her school’s librarian to look for texts. While she doesn’t reach out to local community or iwi, she has ongoing conversations with Māori kaiako at school, finding time a barrier and being unsure who she could or should reach out to in the local community. "I do [think it's important to connect with those communities]. I just haven’t.”

While Tūī’s interview was conducted before the final version of curriculum was released in October 2025, Tūī sees curriculum as a barrier, specifically its failure to mention Te Tiriti or the Treaty meaningfully, and its suggested text list: “[O]ne they put in there was Auē at Level 3 and I’m not sure I want to throw – again, it’s throwing at my kids that kind of negative image of ‘All of Māori have domestic abuse’ you know?”

What she sees as core and special to English as a subject is its ability to teach ākonga “how to be human”. She says:

> You live in Aotearoa so you need to learn how to be a human being in New Zealand so I think that should be everyone’s responsibility. Whether or not we can make people do it is the other thing.

But Tūī has hope for a new generation of teachers coming through into the profession, and their ability to engage more meaningfully with Māori texts and perspectives:

> For me it was a completely new thing. But for my younger teachers coming in, it's not because they've been taught Māori texts at school. They've learned tikanga or learned a little bit of te reo. They're already at an advantage I didn't have so I think there is hope, it's the most important thing that we've got.

4.3 Kākā's Pūrākau

Kākā is a mid-30s teacher at a special character school with what he terms a "reasonably sized" Māori population. He is Pākehā, tall, broad, and fair, he talks fast and bounces quickly and fluidly between thoughts when we meet to discuss his almost 10 years in the classroom. He has previously taught other subjects at his present school and a past school, but he is now an English specialist with a range of year levels and abilities in his purview.

Subject English, Kākā asserts multiple times, is inherently "progressive" and he believes he has benefitted from a strong, progressive department in which the leadership of the English faculty has pushed the teaching of Māori texts, though he acknowledges that mandating can also create push back: "As soon as you say you have to do this, some people are going to go 'Well, we don't want to'. At the same time, if you didn't say that some people would never branch out of their comfort zone."

Core to his experience of teaching Māori texts is his experience as a traditional powerholder, as a "straight white guy" of a sizeable presence, and this external perception of him has allowed him to tackle some of the more difficult student attitudes in his classroom and ascribe "value" to the Māori texts he teaches.

> I notice that very early when I started teaching – kids on the bigotry scale are going to listen to you more if you don't have any stake in the game. A gay teacher comes to a student and says being gay is okay. [Students will say] "Well, you're saying that because

> you're gay, so it matters to you." A straight teacher comes up to a student and says being gay is okay, they go, "Why do you care? Okay. So, if you think that, that's probably a good sign because you don't have to think that." I don't know why it works that way, but it's happened with Māori texts as well.

Kākā has pondered on the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of the Pākehā teacher and the Māori text. When it comes to defining the Māori text, he believes they are Māori centred, or Māori-focused in terms of character and ideally author, though he is willing to include non-Māori creators in this category. He argues that White Lies, Māori Legends and Fairytales, mentioned by Tūī earlier, written by a Pākehā author, would be a Māori text and he has taught it as such. Here he talks about nuance of definition:

> The obvious would be by a Māori author, or by a Māori creator but that also comes into some difficult territory – is *Jojo Rabbit* a Māori text? Could be – it's by Taika Waititi but... So, I guess, predominantly Māori centred. I wouldn't even say Māori-themed because that comes into difficult questions like what is a Māori theme? Are we talking *Once Were Warriors*? It doesn't have to be about broken families and that kind of stuff.

He sees racism at school and in his class, and finds students avoidant towards content around New Zealand texts, echoing Tūī's experiences. For Kākā, Māori texts are "important", valued as conversation starters, and as societal benchmarks of what is and isn't acceptable within New Zealand society. He leans towards social just themes in texts selection – in particular is his focus on injustice, the downtrodden or the underdog, and corrupt systems that have a face. Teaching baseline empathy lives at the heart of his text choices. Such is the case of Shilo Kino's *The Pōrangi Boy*, and an incident in the novel he teaches where the 12-year-old Niko is humiliated by being urinated on. Kākā uses this moment, and the fallout that key moments can have on a life, to discuss stepping outside one's perspective and engaging in empathy. He finds that the more "nuanced" a text gets, the more his experience is "dwarfed by actually lived experience".

To illustrate this, he gives an example of a text he is intending to teach to a senior class. The text's themes of land rights, ownership and authority, while nuanced, he finds himself able to tackle. However, core themes of historical and ancestral discrimination will be putting him out of his comfort zone. A further illustration was an extract used with a class from Michael Bennett's *Better the Blood*. In the extract, main character Hana Westerman, a Māori detective in modern day Auckland, notices another officer has pulled over a young Māori man because of the state of his car. Kākā narrates the scene the students discuss:

> His car's all bung up, he hasn't got a WOF, he hasn't got a WOF because he couldn't afford it, because he's just got a job, he's on his way to that job, and she encourages this cop to let this man go.

As the students work through this extract, Kākā hears their reading of the situation. "Yeah, but he broke the law." He tries to provide a competing understanding of the situation. "Yes, he did, but can you see why you can apply empathy here?" In some cases, the students respond: "Nah, it's only happening because he's Māori." Suddenly Kākā feels out of his depth. Trying to "convince" the students that there could be a competing reading of the incident, one that considers situational awareness, empathy and historical injustice, felt "preachy". He expresses concern over his external perception. Kākā is unsure how impactful this extract was. The extract was not used the following year.

A second experience that confronted Kākā and forced a moment of vulnerability was a moment of "misinterpretation". In teaching *The Pōrangi Boy* to a class of Year 9s, he reads aloud to a class a scene in which the main character is in an urupā following his grandfather's tangi. He narrates:

> We were referring to it as a graveyard, but it wasn't quite that, and once a boy pointed out very respectfully, "Hey sir, that's not really where they are", it was cool okay, brought up the Google on the screen, let's take a look at what it means, I'm applying my lens to a Māori idea and I've missed the point kind of, let's all learn together.

For him, this is a key learning experience. From it, he takes a need to be “able” to reflect on “mistakes, to “iron it out” in class if there is a misunderstanding or misrepresentation and being “humble” enough to accept when someone tells him he is wrong, showing a sense of resilience in the face of confrontation. This vulnerability and transparency in the classroom, and in real time, is “really effective.”

> I think the students respond to, “Oh, the teacher doesn’t know as well. We’re on the same page here. We’ve all learned something new today.” So, it was very successful in that case. Even though it was an, “Oops, my bad”. And I guess you know, there was the approach you could do which is “Actually, you know I’m right as well. I’m a different kind of right” but where does that get you?

Some of his main fears live in concerns of tokenism, of carelessness, of a Pākehā prerogative to categorise and equivocate. He reflects on this often.

> When you were at primary school and you go “Miss, what’s a taonga?” and they go, “It’s a treasure – a taonga is this toy you have, a taonga is this book you have”, and suddenly you’ve missed the cultural context and you actually don’t quite know what it means and why is a pounamu different to a lollipop because if both of them are a treasure what does that mean?

Also present is quiet worry that he is approaching the texts for the wrong reasons and the optics of it all. "If I could pick, with no restrictions, would I gravitate towards Māori texts?” he asks himself. He doesn’t have a good answer to this question of authentic intention, and he worries the students take the teaching as a “performance” devoid of authenticity and fuelled by compulsion of adherence to the modern curriculum.

> And I want to make sure it doesn’t feel that way because I do really enjoy the texts that I’ve picked... We’ve moved on and not ever looked back, but I guess I worry about the optics and how that applies to my own understanding of what I’m doing?

4.4 Kea's Pūrākau

Kea, a teacher in his 40s, has been working as a teacher for over a decade, primarily at a special character school with a smaller Māori population. More recently, he moved to a public school with a higher population of Māori students. He is Pākehā, but he himself went to a majority Māori high school, and additional to his understanding of Māori texts is his connection with te ao Māori through his wife, who has Māori whakapapa.

Kea, like Kākā, is physically tall and imposing, but he has a gentle, soft-spoken demeanour and is quietly reflective during the conversation, which is shared in his classroom. The room is small but bright, filled with colour and wall coverings that feel warm and inviting. Māori phrases such as "Ko te reo tōkū tuakiri" – language is my identity – adorn the walls. For Kea, honouring Te Tiriti means fulfilling the obligation to build a fifty-fifty representative partnership. English is the place where this most clearly can be achieved. "It's about knowing who people are… knowing who we are, knowing how to express yourself, communicate ideas, reading beyond the text and understanding the person behind the text and the culture behind the text."

Kea wants to make it clear early in the discussion that including Māori texts in his teaching was not intrinsic to him, or carried out from personal interest, but rather from seeing a mentor teaching on practicum do it so "naturally" that he saw its' value and its potential. The teacher was using Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* (1987), and Kea found his eyes opened to his lack of knowledge, to how much he didn't know about te ao Māori. He sees this story as being able to invite teachers of a similar knowledge base to take up the challenge:

> People need to be willing to open themselves up to opportunities and there's the safety of I've always done it this way so therefore it works, but the students we're teaching are changing and we need to find ways to connect with them and I think tapping into things that they know culturally is a really effective way to do that.

Kea's mentor teacher triggered a realisation, of just how vital Māori texts are, and he made a deliberate choice at this point to include at least one Māori text (which he defines as either written by a Māori author or "predominantly" includes Māori culture within its elements) each year for each of his classes. A few years into teaching at his first school, this was supported by a departmental initiative to include Māori texts not only in each class once a year, but in each unit taught, similar to Kākā's experiences of departmental mandates to teach Māori texts. While this was a broad guideline that included text types such as newspaper articles alongside novels and poetry, it meant that he found each class was engaging with a Māori text (however broad this definition might be) four or five times throughout each year. Each faculty meeting would set aside a brief period of time, sometimes five minutes, to address questions, texts or concepts that teachers wanted to explore and find support for. At the school he currently teaches at, there is no explicit direction of Māori text inclusion, but for Kea it is now habit. Additionally, with a cohort of predominantly Māori students, he tries to find stories that "connect".

Kea trained as a teacher in the early 2010s and, like Tūī and Kākā, can't remember Māori texts being covered in the pre-service teaching. It wasn't encouraged or discouraged, though the idea that teachers should be upholding the Treaty was part of the training. It wasn't until his placement that he encountered Māori texts.

His own high school experience shaped his teaching of, understanding of, and approach to Māori texts. Like many of the other participants in this study, he deliberately selects texts with "strong, positive characters", not only because he wants to show Māori as successful, but because his own experience of his peers at his Māori majority high school reflected this: "[C]oming from a school where Māori were successful, I always had that understanding that this is the way it should be in the classroom so [I'm] challenging students to do their best all the time rather than 'getting them over the line'." He points to *The Pōrangi Boy*, and the main character of Niko, as a text that can demonstrate this: "Even within his own community he is being

ridiculed, but it's his own mana, his own connection to his culture which ultimately allows him to be successful."

Unlike the other participants, however, is his approach to the idea of stereotypical portrayals of Māori when discussing Alan Duff's 1990 novel *Once Were Warriors* (and Lee Tamahori's 1994 film adaptation of the same name). It is inarguably one of the biggest exports of New Zealand culture to foreign shores, this text has shaped understanding of Māori on an international stage. Kākā and Tūī, as well as soon-to-be-met participants Ruru and Pīwakawaka, all discussed eschewing these texts due to their negative depiction of Māori, the way they deficit theorise and tell a single story of Māori – that specifically of domestic violence, poverty and drug use. For Kea, he approaches the text (speaking of the film) from a unique perspective. He deliberately teaches it alongside themes of representation of Māori across time, and of stereotyping. He will only teach it to senior classes he believes can understand the nuance of such themes. He points out:

> this was written by and directed by a Māori. This is an insider talking about their own people and so what can we take out of that? I might be careful which group I teach it to but it's being put out there. I think we should have access to teach it with the right context.

Kea admits at first, he was "struggling through" in his teaching of Māori texts.

> I know the first couple of years I taught Whale Rider; it was bad. There were probably 80 per cent of the Māori concepts in there I didn't even understand or touch on, I just focused on the few that I knew, but it developed over time.

But consolidation, and resilience, was key: The first year will be challenging, the second year a little bit less, the third year a bit less, and you start to see the links between the books as well." He continues:

> If you were to just pick up the book and read it, I think it would be a big challenge to try and represent successfully, but if you get involved with other aspects of the community … it becomes a lot easier.

Another struggle has been finding texts that speak to him and his interest as a teacher, and access. This means he often falls back on texts, rather than finding more modern ones. Recommendations from other teachers have always been the most useful, but that can create a "little pool" within the school that we never go outside of. This is similar to sentiments explored by both Tūī and Kākā, both in the support they find from colleagues, and in struggles to find meaningful texts.

4.5 Ruru's Pūrākau

Ruru, a non-binary Pākehā teacher in their 40s, presents themselves as confident in their ability to teach Māori texts. In a kōrero in a noisy coffee shop, they attribute this to two specific elements. The first is a childhood engaged with education, with a teacher mum that worked in a predominantly Māori and Pacific school in Auckland. Ruru describes their mother as "ahead of her time", with a pedagogy that allowed children to bring their identities to school, respected families, supported tamariki and whānau through challenge, and "did not point the finger". Ruru's second foundational factor was their completion of a Postgraduate Diploma of Teaching through Ako Mātātupu, an initial teacher training initiative that runs over two years while students teach as Limited Authority to Teach (LAT) teachers. The programme runs alongside the employment, which must be in a low-socioeconomic community, and centres on social justice, and Māori and Pasifika ways of being. Ako Mātātupu training "fully immersed" Ruru, not specifically in the teaching of Māori texts but in mātauranga Māori and teaching as a kaupapa that required the understanding of te ao Māori concepts such as "manaakitanga, aroha, te kotahitanga, tino rangatiratanga". This training and the preparation it instilled stands in stark contrast to the stories of Tūī, Kākā and Kea.

These experiences further fostered what was already a passion for Ruru: the re-indigenisation of education, using strategies that help to support Māori, Pacific and neurodivergent students. Students in general need to understand the “cultural context” they live in:

> we need to make sure the generation that’s coming up through school now are better informed and have a better appreciation for what living in a bicultural country actually means and the gift that we actually have as Pākehā and Tauiwi to be able to live here, it is a gift and not a right and that we need to understand all of that complexity and also the beauty of the culture that we have been allowed to live alongside of, or hopefully with.

They are in their fifth year of teaching at an urban co-educational public school with a significant Māori student body, and find that highly relational, supportive models of teaching are most crucial to them.

Ruru talks about their whakapapa with students, as well as what te ao Māori means to them personally and invite discussion around cultural backgrounds. Te ao Māori is “a really important part of who we are as a people, whether you are Māori, Pākehā or Tauiwi, it’s in the whenua, if you like." Like stories shared by Tūī, Kākā and Kea, Ruru shares with their students a sense of vulnerability, their own perceived lack of expertise and experience, and their learner status.

> I always front it by saying to students I'm not Māori so this is not something I am going to claim to be an expert in and I want to learn together and if you think something that I'm saying isn’t quite right or is completely wrong or you have something to add, I really welcome you doing that.

Teaching Māori texts for Ruru is coming from a place of learning, not just imparting knowledge, and removing hierarchies between teacher and students that opens space for discussions to happen. Ruru believes in acknowledging limitations, inviting conversation and co-construction. They have had kids challenge them and have been confronted in the classroom before.

“Especially ones who think they’re going to get it right. Oh, you stole our land.” But despite confrontation, they persevere with the conversation, in this instance replying “Yeah absolutely, and that is something I think about and that I carry. Do you want to talk more about that?” This kind of co-construction of learning is important to their approach to teaching Māori students and Māori texts, as is reflexivity:

> I think that’s really important as Pākehā, not trying to take up that space and sometimes I've had kids who have been great and really did want to lead in that space and it's awesome when that happens. And if they don’t, I'm like this is what I know and I understand and let's learn about it and research it and think about these things together.

Ruru echoes a similar sentiment to a conversation point with Kea. They assert that regardless of whether there are Māori students in their classroom, they will teach Māori texts and view them as imperative. “It’s part of our heritage; it's our cultural context.” But, like Kea, Ruru works in a majority Māori school and as such sees their role as also honouring and acknowledging the heritage and knowledge of their Māori students and their whānau. Like Tūī, Ruru considers windows and mirrors, ensuring both types are taught, though they prefer to start with mirrors.

> If you can see yourself in a text, then you can look through someone else's text and kind of see some of the similarities whereas if everything feels like I'm not in that I'm not part of it then that’s quite alienating.

Ruru stays away from tropes they perpetuate harmful narratives such as the “noble savage”. Expounding upon their perspective, referenced in Kea’s narrative, they say:

> I still think there’s great things in *Once Were Warriors* and I still think even if someone can read that and put themselves into either Beth’s shoes or Grace’s shoes and have empathy for the situation that they are living in and growing up in, that’s important. I don’t think it’s a terrible book, I just think it’s the danger of a single story.

A strategy Ruru uses is anticipatory front footing of any negative assumption's students might hold. They give an example of Willie Davis' short story “Ka Kite Bro” (1996), which they say they

needed to have the most “preparatory chats” around to frame some of the narrative of a young Māori boy Tama attending the funeral of his Pākehā friend. If they see any issues coming up, they will have a conversation about “how we behave in the classroom and about the way we approach a text.”

Ruru finds colleagues and their recommendations are key supports:

> Every time someone finds a new text that they’re excited about they’ll share it with everybody, we’ll often use those as starter activities in our faculty meetings as well, so someone who has a great activity or a great text will bring it along and we’ll talk about it.

They also share: “I think colleagues are probably the best resource just because nine heads are better than one in terms of finding new things and sharing resources.” While the faculty budget for new text is not significant, repeating ideas shared by Tūī and Kākā, Ruru’s Head of Faculty prioritises New Zealand texts and Māori texts, and Ruru uses the librarian as a resource to also source new texts for the classroom. In addition to this, professional development using texts such as Melanie Riwai-Couch's *Niho Taniwha* (2022) and Russell Bishop’s *Teaching to the North-East* (2019) are supports Ruru rates. A strong relationship with the local iwi, and the frequent presence of iwi representatives also strengthens confidence in connecting with community.

With that comes concerns about positionality and relationship, the way they are perceived to be burdening or bothering Māori staff, students and community:

> I don't want to be that Pākehā who goes and spends hours of someone’s time because I can't be bothered to do my own research or my own learning so finding that balance between being prepared yourself but not assuming you know everything. So, I guess what I would probably try and do is come armed with as much knowledge as I have and go, this is what I’m hoping to do, does that sound alright. And if not, tell me to go away and do some more work on it, and if yes and if you want to add anything awesome.

4.6 Kererū's Pūrākau

Kererū is a Pākehā teacher in her 70s. She has had a long and varied career between schools in the Auckland and Waikato regions. She recalls over a coffee and a muffin the monocultural classrooms of her early career and the growing awareness of Māori "disenfranchisement" that began when she shifted from an urban Auckland school to a rural Waikato school with a majority Māori population and many students living in difficult situations. Of these students, she says: Some of them were really struggling but all of them wanted a better life and in spite of what people say, I have never met a parent who didn't want a better life for their kids.

The school was "non-academic" and many were resistant to the idea of engaging in things Māori. One boy said to her one day in response to her asking why he didn't take te reo, "Do you know what it's like to fail at your own language?" Her arrival at this school coincided with exposure to authors such as Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace who were publishing new works at the time. In concert with this was Kererū's growing awareness and participation in many historical social justice movements, such as the 1975 Land March, the 1977-78 Bastion Point and 1981 Springbok protests. She soon began to use Ihimaera and Grace's texts in her classroom. A few decades on, the school she currently teaches at has "come a long way", with karakia (prayer), tohu (signs) and Māori phrases now commonplace. Of the environment at the school, Kererū reports she hasn't "come across any racism" in more than five years: "I might have a classroom of eight or nine different cultures, and I love that and they all get along." Professional development that took Kererū and colleagues out to Rangiriri, where a lecture on Māori education was presented, has had a significant impact on her. While Kererū was aware of the strapping of students speaking Māori, she was surprised to learn of manual labour pathways set out for Māori students: "I didn't realise that there were actually native schools where they were trained as in The Sapphires to be servants or labourers because they weren't bright enough to go to university."

Kererū selects texts that focus on the effects of colonisation, the way prejudice is taught, and how prejudice based on race and colour is "foolish and causes conflict". In recent years, Kererū has taught texts that focus on the 1881 invasion of Parihaka, specifically Apirana Taylor's poem of the same name. She points to poor text choices as one of the reasons for Māori disenfranchisement historically:

> I think Māori kids used to feel totally out of place in the class that was teaching The Ancient Mariner and Charles Dickens or something. I don't think they felt at home at all, and they never heard a Māori word... I think they just felt sort of, I don't know, it just wasn't their place, and they left school early and there wasn't the feeling that you can be successful too.

She teaches environmental themes as well, using texts such as Witi Ihimaera's The Seahorse and the Reef (1977) for students that she believes care about the environment and want to focus on texts that speak to the issues of the current day. Māori, Pākehā and Tauiwi students all respond and engage well with the Māori texts she teaches, and, similar to Tūī's experiences, she charts growing awareness and social acceptance of te ao Māori and te reo Māori priming students to access these texts when they arrive at high school.

> I think there's a lot more teaching of te reo in Primary schools and I think the kids just accept it. Even in pre-schools. I think they get prepared much better... I think our kids are much more open minded and interested and a lot of them have got Māori friends, relations. One of the girls in one of the classes... she has done really well on her essays about Parihaka because she's angry and that's all right as long as you can support it, it's okay to be angry.

In Kererū's classroom, she wants all students to feel "safe, welcome and comfortable and wanting to learn". Though she reasons that this is not possible for every child, she believes this is what you should try to do. Lenses are a focus of her teaching and understanding multiple perspectives by changing the lens through which you view a text. Alongside this, she spends a

significant amount of time teaching the historical context of the Māori texts she teaches, especially in her dual teaching of Apirana's *Parihaka* (2009) with Tim Finn's song lyrics *Parihaka (1989).* She does not believe a text can effectively be taught without context, and ensures the students engage with learning about the historical events that underlay texts.

Unlike Ruru and Tūī, she doesn't explicitly teach about her own cultural heritage in the teaching of Māori texts, and she believes some students have assumed she is Māori because of her teaching of Māori texts. But she echoes the same intentional vulnerable act as Tūī, Kākā, Kea and Ruru in that she "doesn't pretend to know everything" about the Māori texts she teaches.

> I think that's important because I think Māori kids sometimes resent it when you come in and tell them about their culture or something like that. I think the kids really engage with it and show an interest in it and are happy to discuss it, and their responses show a depth of understanding and feeling. But I never pretend that I am Māori or that I know everything about the Māori culture.

While she struggles at times still with pronunciation – something she says is "easy to let go" – the perception of how she is teaching Māori texts and the value of the texts to the students themselves are perhaps her biggest considerations.

> I want the kids to understand it's important and also enjoy it as well. But then I think about that with all the texts really. It's no use forcing it down their throat is it, I try not to preach, I do point out that the things like the colonisers did think they were doing the right things, and I ask them what the effects of colonisation were but I don't stand there and say colonisation was an evil thing – I think that's better they find that out for themselves.

4.7 Pīwakawaka's Pūrākau

Pīwakawaka is a bubbly, effervescent Pākehā woman in her 50s approaching 30 years of teaching, all of which has been at the same urban special character school. The school is coeducational, and most of the students are Pākehā which proves difficult in getting understanding and acceptance of the Māori texts she teaches. She has done a lot of self-prompted study over the last few years, including five courses that have covered te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. This has sometimes put her into positions she finds uncomfortable at school – because she has "a little bit of knowledge" she has been asked to teach te reo Māori, to help design the school pōwhiri and run the school's kapa haka group. "All these sorts of things and I've got *this* much knowledge, and I'm not Māori, and I'm not from Tainui."

Pīwakawaka sees the teaching of Māori texts as "essential" if only to "normalise it." Failing to include Māori perspectives in education fuels "us and them" ideology. "We've got this beautiful rich culture and beautiful language and different ideas and we are one. We can only be stronger knowing these stories and it's wonderful."

Pīwakawaka's faculty debated how to define what makes a Māori text – they questioned if a text could be defined as such if a Māori wrote the text but otherwise it was "secular". Ultimately, it was Pīwakawaka's call and she wrote a unit for herself and other teachers in the department based on short stories written by Māori writers. These texts include a Māori concept of some sort – kotahitanga (unity), manaakitanga (hospitality) – and should reveal new learnings about te ao Māori. Pīwakawaka slightly acquiesces: "I guess potentially someone, a Pākehā writer could write that but just trying to support Māori writers who are putting ideas out there and how does that align with Tainui."

She tries to use texts associated with Tainui to keep local connection and help her students "understand the references that are here". She points to Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace. "I try to pick stories that has kids figuring out who they are. Dystopian discovery, that's the age they're at."

Perceptions from the mostly white, religious families that make up the school community have been a barrier for Pīwakawaka's teaching of Māori texts. Concerns around elements of Māori spirituality have limited the range of what she is able to teach. These attitudes, which Pīwakawaka says are fuelled by fear and ignorance, are addressed through a number of strategies; she keeps in good communication with whānau to explain "what we're teaching and why we're teaching". "Anything that goes out that has Māori next to it, it always has English language next to it." She has had a few negative experiences; a student who refused to engage and she sent for a walk before a restorative with a Senior Leader, another student who behaved in a hostile manner when a Māori expert visited to help with sharing aspects of te ao Māori. In that incident, the parents were called in:

> The parents were gobsmacked their child was so rude. I asked them "Do you ever talk about this negatively from a Māori world view?" The dad's head dropped, it clicked to him his child was just doing what he does at home.

Pīwakawaka perseveres regardless, displaying a resilient disposition and taking these incidents as further justification for the inclusion of the texts. Pīwakawaka has coached many of her co-teachers to deliver the Māori text unit she has created. Now, after a few years of using the content, she finds they are starting to display some personal confidence. "I think it's scary for non-Māori to take on Māori texts, but if you've got good back up and support, it'll grow to a feeling that you feel confident, confident to... you're feeling humble in teaching it." This support of colleagues resonates strongly with comments made by Kākā and Ruru.

The teaching begins with pepeha (formulaic expression, introductory speech), and Pīwakawaka emphasises the complications stories of origin can have. This allows the students, many of whom have migrated to New Zealand, to then talk about where they have come from. She then prefaces the text teaching with explicit learning of Māori concepts which the students then need to be able to identify in the stories they study. Her students engage well with the texts

themselves “once they realise that the learning isn’t going to be Māori indoctrination, that it’s just another text with another learning in it that’s similar to what they’re going through”.

Her greatest success has come from the teaching of a Tainui based short story to a class of Year 10 students. As part of the learning, students handwrote letters to the author asking questions about the text and sharing their own stories. The author wrote back to each student individually, with a signed copy of his new book. He related his narrative to his Tainui affiliation, writing “being a chief of the language” was “passing it on” through story. This experience had an indelible impact for the class: “It was just a real experience about connecting with a Māori author – it was not just that he was Māori... we have now got a connection... so that’s made it real for this group.”

She later in the conversation relates another story that she ties back to this. A student applying for a leadership position shared in his application that he was Māori:

> You’d never know looking at him and you’d never know from anything he’s done at school this year. He wrote in it ‘I now feel safe to tell you who I am.’ That’s evidence we’re doing the right thing. You always think, am I pushing a barrier, am I doing this because the government says I should include things or because I think it’s really good value for my students. I want them to have that feeling of belonging.

In this narrative, Pīwakawaka shows some of the same reflexivity around questions of authentic intent that Kākā asks himself.

Like all the previous participants narratives she clarifies she is teaching “someone else’s story”, with humility being key to this foregrounding. The acknowledgement allows open dialogue: “You don’t come across knowing everything. You know a little bit, and that little bit you want to share.”

The perceptions and attitude of the school community come top of list of Pīwakawaka’s barriers. While she sees positive shifts in attitude have been made through the last few years,

and has had support from Senior Leadership in addressing concerns from parents, the tension endures:

> we have had Māori groups come into our school and blame – that damage... takes years to get rid of that damage, of that one session nine years ago and they still bring it up. It's not our fault. That unfortunately was what the takeaway was for that. Sometimes it safer to have a Pākehā teach a Māori text because it's me telling you what I've learnt about this culture and te ao Māori whereas if it's a Māori coming in, it's them and us. I've asked many friends to come in and share the load so they can see it's not just me, it's not just them, it's a we, it's an us.

Additional to that is worry that staff in the team-teaching environment are not wholly on board with the content. To teach well, the "teaching staff need to be on board, and I feel probably they tolerate my passion and they do the unit because they have to, not because it belongs to them." In talking about Māori text teaching being made compulsory, she points to a lack of funding through the education pathway to help teachers feel a sense of passion for Māori text:

> I think we have to be exposed to it, or it will never be normalised. If it's not their thing, there's just no way I could convince anybody … yeah, it's a tough one. There's no funding for anything. You can't put the cart in front of the horse, so you've got to have that passion that teachers need to be there to grow that into their department.

Worrying about her interpretation of the text is also a challenge as is a lack of time to work on including texts effectively.

Core to Pīwakawaka's strengthening of practice and pedagogy is communication with colleagues and mentors. She keeps in contact with old lecturers who she turns to, one in particular who affiliates with Tainui and provides a Tainui perspective to her questions and concerns. Māori teachers who are friends also answer questions and work problems through with her.

4.8 Summary

After reviewing and considering the narratives of the six participants, it was evident that they had a number of areas of concern and concentration in terms of shared views around the teaching of Māori texts. The participants definitions and understanding of Māori texts, their choices around the selection of Māori texts, and their views on incorporating them showed many similarities but also a few key differences. Essentially, the participants demonstrated a lack of shared understanding themselves, and within their school communities. As a result, there is a great variation to the way the term “Māori text” is applied across the six schools the participants teach at. There was also concern around the internal and external pressures of authentically engaging with Māori texts, what this might mean and how this might look, with public perception from students and whānau discussed both implicitly and explicitly.

All but one of the teachers felt inadequate preparation from their initial teacher programmes in developing their ability to engage with Māori texts. In most cases, a further point of cross over and amplification was the use of colleagues to support gaps in knowledge and share concerns and resources with. The biggest take-away to be discussed in the discussion chapter was the concerted effort of all participants to deny expertise in Māori texts and working through discomfort, engaging in a pedagogy of vulnerability and demonstrating visible resilience. Finally resourcing came up as a key narrative point, with the participants sharing a number of worries related to financial resourcing of texts, allocation of time, Ministry-supported resources and professional development, in order to adequately prepare to teach Māori texts effectively.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The research findings show a profession grappling with internal tensions and competing priorities. In this chapter, I seek to explore, analyse, and build from this rich, textured interpretive data to answer the two questions at the heart of the research:

1. What are Pākehā teachers' experiences and perspectives on teaching Māori texts in English classrooms?
2. What strategies do Pākehā teachers employ to incorporate Māori texts in English classrooms, and what are the barriers and facilitators influencing their practice?

This discussion is framed through the concept of a rourou, as is introduced in the guiding whakataukī of this thesis in Chapter 1: *Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi.* The whakataukī is a metaphor for the essentiality of shared knowledge as a source of kai, or sustenance, for student wellbeing, and has successfully proliferated through the education sector. And shared knowledge – in the case of this study it presents as Māori texts – is essential. This is reflected through participant perspectives in this chapter in response to Research Question 1.

When this study commenced, the concept was to examine what was *inside* the rourou, a small kete (basket) made for food from harakeke (flax). However, as I consider the findings, I realise that the most compelling takeaway turns out to be an examination of the structural integrity of the rourou *itself*. When we focus our attention on the contents of the kete, we can ignore or at least risk ignoring, how well equipped the kete is to carry anything in the first place. The findings of this study, and the discussion that follows, attempts to rectify such an oversight.

When reflecting on the wisdom of the whakataukī, it becomes apparent that the rourou must be *adequately* woven together by many appropriate flax aho (strands) to achieve its purpose to bring wellbeing to the people. A broken kete will lose its contents; it cannot endure.

To put it more squarely in the context of this study, the rourou is the teacher's preparation and capacity to teach Māori texts. To be adequately woven, it needs many strands of harakeke.

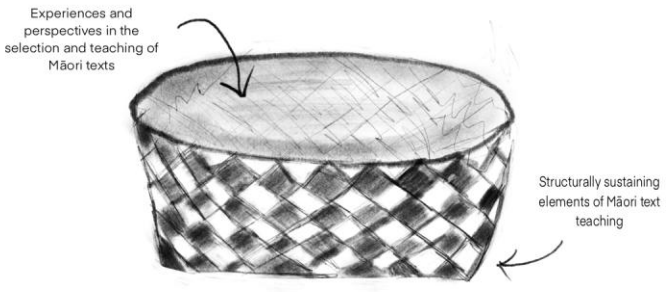

Fig. 1: Examining the rourou for its contents and structural integrity

Should there be a failure to provide such aho through deliberate, explicit and proactive support from the educational sector and the Ministry of Education – if the structurally sustaining elements are weak – then it is hard to see how any level of knowledge will be held adequately to sustain ākonga.

Through this discussion the themes are arranged in response to the research questions. In addressing Research Question One, this discussion unpacks the data exploring participants experiences and perspectives of teaching Māori texts which are, in my conceptualised rourou, the kai or contents inside. This first section details teacher perspectives around definitions of Māori texts; teacher-applied values and meaning of Māori texts; and participant experiences of agency in text selection, as well as aspects of resourcing that affect it.

The discussion then moves to Research Question Two as it explores themes speaking to strategies, barriers, and enablers when Pākehā teachers teach Māori texts, which this research posits is the harakeke in the teacher rourou, the structural make up that bears the weight of the kai, or knowledge. This section looks at the barriers of inadequate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) training, and of teacher anxieties. The discussion then moves to enabling factors, looking at the role of colleagues, collaboration, and support. The concluding section

unpacks deliberate culturally responsive acts of vulnerability and resilience, which operate as both an enabler and a proactively chosen strategy.

5.2 What are Pākehā teachers' experiences and perspectives on teaching Māori texts in English classrooms?

In this section, the metaphorical kai of the rourou is detailed, analysing the perspectives and experiences of kaiako when they integrate Māori texts into their classrooms.

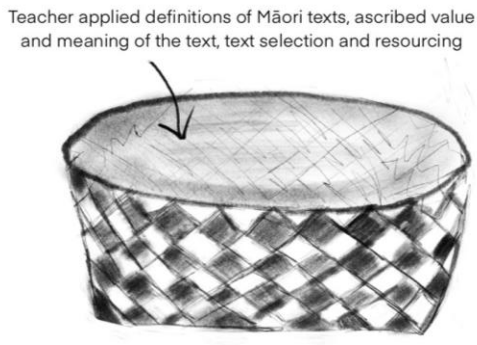

Fig. 2: Teacher perspectives and experiences as sustaining kai

5.2.1 Teacher Applied Definitions of the Māori Text

There is no clear consensus on what constitutes as a Māori text among Pākehā teachers in this study. Each participant shows notable variances in understanding and meaning when discussing their definition of a “Māori text”. Rather than a concrete consensus definition, what emerged instead were concrete criteria of what would constitute the *ideal* example of a Māori text. These ideal exemplary texts would then be those that:

1. convey te ao Māori concepts, such as manaakitanga or tino rangatiratanga
2. are centred on a Māori character
3. are authored by a Māori creator

These three ideas were raised in all interviews, by each participant. Texts that meet these three criteria are held up as the best example of what makes a text Māori, such as Shilo

Kino's *The Pōrangi Boy* (2020) in which all three criteria are met with a Māori author writing about a Māori main character, Niko, exploring Māori concepts such as kaitiakitanga (guardianship). However, while an ideal text, in their views, might meet all three criteria, participants did not deem it *necessary* for a text to possess all three criteria for it to be categorised as a *Māori* text. Pākehā authors who explore te ao Māori concepts and centre Māori characters (characteristics one and two) were accepted in the findings as being creators of Māori texts. Texts that are not inherently Māori in content but have been created by a Māori creator (criteria three) are also accepted as Māori texts, with an outlying example of this given as Taika Waititi's *Jojo Rabbit* (2019) which, while directed by a Māori creator, centres on German boy Jojo in World War Two Germany, and does not explicitly engage in discussion of Māori concepts. Even so, two participants posited that they would consider it a Māori text based on authorship alone.

This variability and lack of consensus is partially due to insufficient Ministry guidance, with changing expectations overtime such as only suggesting the inclusion of "Maori perspectives", and "New Zealand texts by Maori authors and about Maori" in the 1994 curriculum (p. 14) which foregrounds Māori content, in comparison with the 2025 curriculum which states "must" use "texts by a range of authors representative of New Zealand's rich bicultural (both Māori and Pākehā)" (pp. 42, 53) which prioritises authorship.

As it stands, there are still no clear guidelines produced by the Ministry of Education defining what is a Māori text. While this gives a sense of freedom to teachers to select texts they believe best for their classrooms which are "both engaging and suitably challenging" (Ministry of Education, 2025, p. 52), there is also a danger when such great breadths of interpretation can be applied. When applying the 2025 curriculum guidelines as they are written, Māori authorship is the only clearly identified aspect of texts that "must" be included. This does not therefore ensure that Māori perspectives are included in texts. If you apply the 2007 guidelines that "should" have been explored, texts that have "Māori perspectives" are mentioned as are texts

that are Māori authored and “about” Māori. With many participants reporting a limited timeframe in which to teach extended texts, it is likely only one novel is taught at each year level. With these constraints, the “type” of “Māori text” selected by the teacher then informs the student world view around, aiding them to “gain insights into the diversity and complexity of human experience” (Ministry of Education, 2025b, p. 3). These texts “affirm and set the social and ethical values” (Grace, 2021, p. 225) of the people they are about to the students who encounter, shaping self-identity when they are familiar, or helping readers to know others when they are not. Teachers then need to consider intention and outcome – what is the intended use of the Māori text in the classroom and what is the outcome of its use? If it is to explore a Māori perspective, to shape identity and help students not of a Māori background to know Māori experience, could this be achieved by a Pākehā author? Could it be achieved by a Māori author who is not explicitly using Māori characters or discussing Māori world views? Herein lies the dangers of ambiguity. If teachers do not have clear, explicit, accessible guidelines to these questions, how are they then able to be confident in their text selection and their use of these texts within the classroom.

Considering this contested ground, Smith’s work calls for deep engagement with authorship. Discussing research, Linda Tuhiwai Smith repudiates the way in which the West “desire[s], extract[s] and claim[s] ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce” while “simultaneously” rejecting Māori creators and denying “further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations” (Smith, 2021, p. 36). To bring this research into the context of the English classroom and this research, Smith’s framework suggests that non-Māori authors – representatives of the West – take Māori concepts and characters and claim ownership of Māori ways of knowing, which are then reproduced in English classrooms by Pākehā teachers – a secondary agent of the West. In this way, these texts and their selection then have the potential to reject Māori creators' ability to create and produce culture, instead prioritising non-Māori imagining of Māori culture. Authorship

is further explored in Torres Straight academic Martin Nakata's work *The Cultural Interface* (2007). Nakata argues that knowledge creation by non-indigenous creators, in this case Māori, would be "about" Māori, and could be seen to position Māori as objects, in contrast texts by Māori convey Māori ways of being and knowing. This dichotomy grapples with whether non-Māori can truly, authentically, and deeply convey Māori experience and culture. This returns to the dangers of ambiguity, in which individual teacher perspectives will vary and therefore result in many variations in the way teachers apply and teach "Māori texts".

The new curriculum may mandate the inclusion of texts authored by Māori by the first time, but it fails to go into detail about what this means. In correspondence, the Ministry writes that "authorship matters" and that "literature is grounded in mātauranga Māori, whakapapa, reo, and lived experience" (Ministry of Education, personal communication, January 26, 2026) but while this clarification for the purposes of explaining Māori texts is useful, this signalling of authorship, and discussion of "mātauranga Māori, whakapapa, reo, and lived experience" is missing from the curriculum itself. With substantial changes in curriculum expectations over the last 3 years, with many versions of draft curriculums produced and disseminated, the information needs to be clear and transparent. This is especially true when considering the final curriculum was released in October 2025, for implementation in Years 7 through 10 programmes only three months later. I sought clarification around the signalling of authorship from the Ministry as part of this research, but this clarification has not been widely publicised nor explicitly, deliberately communicated to teachers. Without this further clarification being widely accessible, teachers will continue to struggle with consistent understandings of Māori texts, and their use in the classroom, especially given that this is a mandate within the new curriculum. This ongoing tension cannot be solved without clear guidelines around what is, and what is not, indigenous, and robust, Ministry led discussion about best practice inclusion in programmes of learning.

5.2.2 Teacher Ascribed Value and Meaning of Māori Texts

In this study, the teacher participants ascribed value to Māori texts by positioning them within the "personal growth" discourse of English, in which teachers see literature as a vehicle for empathy, and cognitive development (Gibbons, 2017). Māori texts' inclusion in literature programmes is rationalised with value-laden language such as "imperative", "essential" and "important" by the participants, locating them as foundational in the curriculum for the rich cultural understanding they provide to students. Māori texts were described by the participants for their aesthetic quality – "rich", beautiful", and containing "complexity" – and their functionality – they "expose" and "normalise", they create "empathy" and make society "stronger". This is consistent within the "personal growth" model, illustrating a clear relationship between aesthetic literature, and the personal development of the students who encounter the literature.

The positively framed, relational verbs used by the participants further illuminated the way texts and Māori perspectives are included by the teachers – they are "embraced", "incorporated" and used for "understanding". These verbs of contact imply teachers view Māori texts as tools of cultural exposure for students. This dialogues with Style's (1988) mirror and window texts framework in which texts allow students to either see themselves (mirrors) or see the lives and experiences of others (windows) reflected. As tools of cultural exposure, teachers in this study mainly position Māori texts as window texts, in which non-Māori ākonga see into the Māori experience. Though positively framed, implicit in language such as "expose" and "normalise" is an unspoken grounding of te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori being external to the default – namely Pākehā – worldview. But there is also acknowledgement from participants that Māori texts occupy both of Style's identified roles simultaneously; they are windows for non-Māori ākonga, but they also function as mirrors for ākonga Māori to see themselves reflected back. They give ākonga Māori needed and deserving "public validation of the school curriculum" (Style, 1988, p. 5).

This study also identifies the creation of social cohesion within Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural partnership as core to using Māori knowledge and Māori texts, with participants citing a sense of collective cultural identity as a bridge or point of connection between Māori and, specifically, Pākehā. Bishop's "sliding glass doors" addition (1990) to Style's framework then comes into play, allowing readers – in this case non-Māori – to enter the world Māori texts create as windows can become mirrors, and then doors through which students can walk into worlds they have never occupied, such as non-Māori students into the world of Māori perspective. In doing so, students can "celebrate our differences and our similarities" (para. 11) through comparative study. For non-Māori ākonga, sliding doors can aid the development of empathy and decentre the dominant narratives of Pākehā experience, while Māori students find validation, and potentially, as argued by Bacalja and Bliss (2019), healing of historical trauma through efforts to pass down of cultural practices, knowledge, and histories. This allows ākonga Māori to succeed as they see their culture being valued and integrated into their learning, giving opportunity to "cultivate cultural integrity" (Gay, 2000, p. 44). Consequently, failing to include Māori texts is seen by participants as damaging to Te Tiriti, to the development of socially conscious citizens and undermining to social cohesion.

This rationale exhibits much about the way Māori texts are taught in the classroom and how they are perceived. Their role becomes one of social instruction, of cultural acquisition and cultural meaning making for students. This is consistent with a study conducted by Indigenous Australian researcher Amy Thomson, where Australian English teachers and students also reported the expectation that indigenous texts "foster students' sense of respect for and understanding of Indigenous communities" and "promote a sense of allyship as a result of an improved understanding of colonialism and its ongoing impacts" (2024, p. 19). The same is true of the six participants in this study. Student empathy is an expected outcome of the teachers' instruction, as is a greater sense of student understanding of colonial histories and their ongoing

effects on Māori communities in the modern day. In applying Ladson-Billings work, this culturally responsive teaching leads ākonga to “develop a critical consciousness” and “challenge the status quo of the current social order” (1995, p. 160). As such, Māori texts are seen as active, vibrant agents of change, aiding students to “challenge the status quo” as they “normalise” and “expose” Māori perspectives for students. Māori texts are powerful in their ability to demonstrate shared values and connections that can conjure a feeling of shared belonging for all students in the classroom.

At the same time, this narrative of harmony occupies a space of tension as can be seen as counteractive to Māori text creator intentions of asserting tino rangatiratanga (self-determination and sovereignty) such as evidenced by Grace, Ihimaera and Hereaka in literature explored earlier. Further, it negates the carving of Māori identity explored through texts, and the locating of work within hapū and iwi affiliations. As Trinity Thomson-Browne (2022) writes: “In te ao Māori, storytellers are never separate from the communities they exist in” (para. 31).

Collapsing Māori, Pākehā and Tauiwi into a collective “we” removes the unsettled identities of students as readers and what these identities bring to the table when students navigate their way through studies of Māori texts. Specifically for Māori creators and Māori students, it is important to note that Māori do not occupy a singular, fixed identity – the collective “we” – but instead negotiate identity through relational, pluralistic ties (Sibley & Houkamau, 2013). The collective “we” that is centred in teacher discussions of Māori texts, displacing an intentional centring of Māori perspective, can therefore undermine Māori self-assertion. This space of tension should thus be a place where teachers reflect actively and often on the ways in which Māori texts are being presented in their classrooms.

5.2.3 Teacher Agency in Selection of Māori Texts

Text selection in the English classroom is never neutral and inherently texts demonstrate an understanding of culture and history (Bacalja & Bliss, 2019). In this context, the perceptions of the teachers in this study around the Māori texts they choose to include, and which they choose to omit, tells a story that is worth examining.

As was explored in my literature review, English teachers in New Zealand have a great amount of agency in their text selection, with relatively few constraints put upon what they decide to use in their classroom teaching (Hubbard, 2017). Consistently, the six teachers in this study used this agency to select texts with positive representations of Māori characters and of te ao Māori that: avoid deficit theorising, are seen as mana-enhancing, and contain complex and nuanced understandings of Māori characters and their worlds. This can be seen through Kākā's choice of *The Pōrangi Boy* which contains a nuanced depiction of main Māori Niko as he enacts kaitiakitanga, and Ruru's use of short story "Ka Kite, Bro" in in which main Māori character Tama emotively grapples with cultural differences between Pākehā funeral and tangi. These positive depictions often are paired with explicit thematic teaching of justice, prejudice and the effects of colonisation. This study finds that teachers intentionally exclude narratives that perpetuate harmful ideology of Māori, specifically naming the noble savage trope, and stereotypes of drug and alcohol use, broken homes and domestic violence.

Discussion of *Once Were Warriors*, both in its novel and film forms, best illustrates participant perspectives around what teachers choose to exclude. Despite being referenced in five of the six interviews as a text to avoid, two participants found value in the narrative as a Māori-authored work but argued it contained danger as a 'single story' (Adichie, 2009) which flattens and reduces Māori to negative stereotypes. As Alice Te Punga Somerville writes: "A narrow range of Māori representations can lead people to think that real Māori people look or act or feel a narrow range of ways" (2021, para. 25). But while the narrowing of perceptions of Māori to all ākonga is a cause of much concern, the further danger is the impact this single

story, this narrowing, has on ākonga Māori specifically. Patricia Grace gives language to this in which she writes that it is “dangerous” for ākonga to engage with “negative, demeaning, insensitive and untrue” stories of characters that are supposed to reflect them (2021, p. 225). Ihimaera uses the word “poison” in his own experience of deficit theorising and stereotyping texts (2014, p. 352).

This study sees teachers engaging with this problem by selecting texts that foreground Māori characters and contextualise their lives with nuanced representation as a deliberate, culturally responsive practice. As explored through the work of Johnson and Sassi (2023), the prioritisation of texts that discuss cultural practices, knowledge, and histories is an opportunity to address inequity for ākonga Māori. When the texts the teachers select show positive depictions of Māori that reject deficit theorising (Bishop et al., 2003; Bishop, 2009), students are then able to see that issues and problems are located within the structures and systems Māori characters live in, rather than within the characters themselves. Positive depictions are, therefore, central to deliberate teacher practice of culturally responsive pedagogy. Bishop and Berryman (2006) show that opening the door to “culturally generated ways of knowing and learning” (p. 17) improves ākonga Māori engagement. Further to academic success, the teachers and their selected texts “validate, facilitate, liberate and empower” (Gay, 2000, p. 43) Māori students, they cultivate their integrity.

However, it is worth noting that while positive depictions are valuable for students, teachers eschewing texts altogether that contain negative or difficult depictions of Māori also has impact. Avoiding such texts – as exampled by Tūī’s perspective on Becky Manawatu’s novel *Auē* being too dark for students, or the perspectives around *Once Were Warriors* as deficit theorising – can deny ākonga opportunities to engage critically and analytically. Jacobs (1993) writes “To present students with a picture of a biasfree society is, first of all, probably impossible, and, secondly, would leave them unprepared to face the world as it is actually constructed” (p. 4). Thus, an approach to stereotypes is needed that prepares ākonga to

challenge harmful depictions of Māori, understand the colonial history of New Zealand literature that has produced and disseminated negative Māori depictions, and learn to recognise and repudiate stereotypes of Māori, rather than accept them. This is the basis of the argument for Kea, who teaches *Once Were Warriors* to senior classes in direct conversation with the idea of stereotypes, specifically to expose their harm. This positions “difficult” texts – whether they are Māori-authored with dark themes and negative depictions, or non-Māori authors with stereotypical and inaccurate representations – as valuable, *when* taught with the right pedagogical approach and framework to older students capable of seeing nuance. If a teacher can engage with difficult texts with strategies, time, confidence and support, foregrounding the complexities of the text to avoid reinforcing stereotypes, these texts have the potential to strengthen students’ ability to engage critically and interrogatively with literature. Difficult discussions can provide important and valid learning for ākonga when conducted by teachers equipped to have them in safe, culturally affirming environments (Matesan, 2025). They also would be best used in concert with a range of other texts that include positive depictions, to show a variety of representations.

Still, providing student texts that provide any sort of representation is a complex issue. The cost of new texts is a source of concern for teachers, as class sets can take a toll on small faculty budgets. Before purchases of texts are made, teachers in this study report that they must feel confident the text will be used long term and not quickly abandoned. As such, “tried and true texts” continue to dominate because fears newer texts will not be engaging for students, even if, as with *Once Were Warriors*, there remains concern around the possible harm of remaining stuck with such single stories.

Considerations around the exposure of resources also led to discussion around how kaiako are supported to learn about, read, understand, and prepare materials for new Māori texts that they may not even know exist. Other pressures mentioned in the data are selecting texts that support teacher to best teach to assessment, as well as general text engagement,

especially those of extended text, with most teachers preferring to teach short texts that are easier to resource and to engage students with. As such, Pākehā teacher perception of text choice and resourcing remains an area that would benefit from further research, and exploration by the Ministry of Education.

5.3 What strategies do Pākehā teachers employ to incorporate Māori texts in English classrooms, and what are the barriers and facilitators influencing their practice?

In this section, the aho – or strands – of sustaining practice are explored.

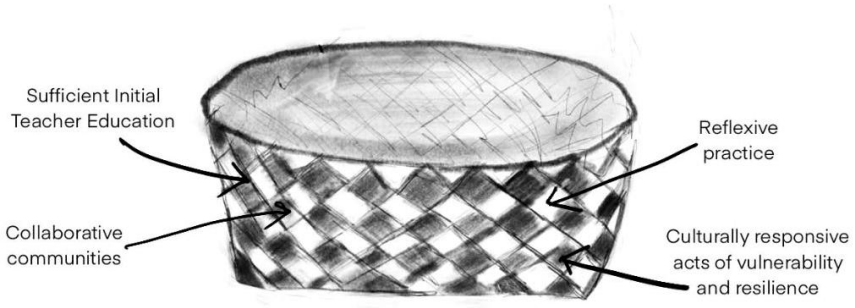

Fig. 3: Structural supports in the form of aho (strands) to strengthen the rourou

5.3.1 Inadequate ITE Preparation to Teach Māori Text and Māori worldviews

The majority of participants within this study report feeling inadequately prepared by their Initial Teacher Education to engage with Māori texts in the classroom and incorporate Māori world views in their instruction. Of the six participants, five trained through university-run Initial Teacher Education programmes and one trained through an independent training institution. Those who had gone through the university programmes unanimously reported covering aspects of Te Tiriti but felt they lacked preparation to engage with the cultural elements of English teaching. Māori texts as focuses of classroom instruction and study were not explicitly covered, the complexities of engaging with Māori concepts was absent, and training around

engaging in difficult conversations around culture non-existent. This supports Anthony and Kane's (2008) findings of pre-service and first year teachers lacking confidence in engaging with supporting Māori ākonga. It furthers existing evidence that "teacher education has largely prepared educators to perpetuate Western knowledge frameworks while marginalising mātauranga Māori" (Ruawai-Hamilton, 2024, p. 85). The one participant who was trained through an independent training institution, Ako Mātātupu, did feel a better sense of preparation. This can clearly be linked to the philosophy of the institution itself, with a foundation built on addressing inequities through a programme centring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. While Ruru did not have preparation around explicitly teaching Māori texts, the constant focus of the training on kaupapa Māori values supported their ability to engage with Māori world views, and by extension Māori texts, in the classroom. This study and its findings gives NZEI's call for programmes with "a genuinely bicultural model" emphasis as Ruru's contrasting experience and feeling of efficacy from the other participants demonstrates the ability such programmes as Ako Mātātupu have to "address deep seated issues in education, redress the impacts of colonisation on education of Māori and non-Māori, and combat systemic racism and discrimination" (NZEI, n.d., p. 7) while also normalising te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori. While this thesis does not have the capacity to fully explore all aspects of the Initial Training Education programmes, this research speaks to a clear failing in traditional modes of teacher training programmes to give the training necessary to fully support English teachers in being able to honour Te Tiriti, and taonga such as Māori texts protected by Te Tiriti, fully. As such, as current ITE training programmes currently operate, they are seen as a barrier to teaching Māori texts effectively.

5.3.2 Teacher Anxieties of Authenticity and Perception when using Māori Texts

A central barrier that appeared in this study was that of teacher anxieties around whether their use of Māori texts is authentic, and how their use of the texts is perceived by their

communities. These two pressures are contrasting, the first internally found and the second externally, but are linked in their impact of teacher perception of authenticity.

The anxiety that is cultivated by internally located pressure comes from questions of personal authenticity and self-doubt around the use of Māori texts when examining intrinsic motivations for doing so. While there have historically been no mandates that enforce Māori text inclusion, participants within the study report working within faculties that have their own policies ensuring Māori perspective and Māori author inclusion. These expectations have led many of the participants to reflect on the way in which they approach the texts, and if it is with an authentic intent. Best encapsulating the concern of authentic intent is Kākā's question of self-reflection: "If I could pick, with no restrictions, would I gravitate towards Māori texts?" This speaks to fears of performativity when teachers are part of a department with a sense of collective agency that prescribe Māori texts. Reflecting the work of Watson et al. (2022), the participants in this study talked about Māori text inclusion as "collective decision-making", using inclusive, plural language such as "we" to describe faculty decision making in rationalising text choice. However, at times the anxiety arose that this collective inclusion was at odds, or at least obscuring, true ownership of text selection.

A related barrier that creates teacher anxiety is the way participants are perceived as they carry out their instruction around the text. This external pressure asks questions about how the teachers, and their engagement with Māori texts, are viewed, primarily by the students, but also by fellow teachers, students, whānau, and the wider community. Phraseology used to express this particular fear by the participants include concern around "optics", being seen as "preachy", and of accusations of enacting "Māori indoctrination".

The anxiety induced upon teachers by these two contrasting conflicts is in dialogue with Hotere-Barnes' Pākehā Paralysis (2015) framework. The teachers in this study self-report willingly engaging in complex cultural conversations and relationships, unlike those who truly experience Pākehā paralysis. However, they do display aspects of emotional and intellectual

difficulty for “fear of getting it wrong; concern about perpetuating Māori cultural tokenism; negative previous experiences with Māori; a confusion about what the ‘right’ course of action may be” (p. 41). This is initially a form of paralysis, but where the participants’ behaviour differs from the subjects of Tolich and Hotere-Barnes' work is these teachers reject paralysis – fear and avoidance – and instead choose to act, in whatever way they feel best honours the texts and the students they are in relationships with. In doing so, the teachers engage with the “optimism capabilities” Hotere-Barnes suggest which can negate paralysis.

These capabilities include 1) teachers “valuing” their own identities demonstrated by the participants asserting Pākehā identities and sharing their own cultural heritage, 2) sitting comfortably in “complexity” as they navigate the subversion of traditional educational power dynamics, and their own roles as learners, and 3) “commit to evolving and long-term relationships” by continually working with texts and with colleagues to enrich and sustain their teaching of Māori voice despite moments of discomfort. The engagement of initial discomfort, concern, fear and confusion by the teachers by applying these “capabilities” is therefore not paralysis but pause – positive, reflexive practice. The questions that these teachers engage with of their own authentic intent and the public perception are useful and necessary to sit with and reflect on, rather than ignore. Clearly, authenticy-induced anxiety can act as a barrier for teachers but there are ways to navigate this barrier as detailed in this section, and in a further section exploring dispositions of vulnerability and resilience.

5.3.3 High Value of Colleague Collaboration and Support

One of the strategies the participants discussed consistently through the six narratives is utilising colleague collaboration and support. The concept of a “colleague” varies widely, encompassing members of the participants’ English departments, school librarians, Māori language teachers and ethnically Māori teachers across disciplines within their schools.

Teachers from different schools with whom they can discuss their work at subject workshops and events are also considered in this broad definition. The participants draw upon these communities to gain knowledge in areas they feel they are lacking to support the teaching of Māori concepts and voice. This high value the participants ascribe to their colleague's shared knowledge is unsurprising considering evidence suggests collaboration leads to more effective teacher practice, positively impacting ākonga engagement and achievement (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020; Gibbs, 2005; Wylie, 2011).

The participants utilise both formal and informal opportunities to collaborate. Formal settings referenced include faculty meetings explicitly discussing text choices and approaches to teaching; professional development providing context to the history of Māori education and understandings of aspects of te ao Māori; and subject association conferences hosting workshops on best practices as well as addresses by Māori authors themselves. Tūī also references learning programmes such as TupuOra and He Papa Kainga as locations of successful discussion of teaching Māori texts. These professional development opportunities are key for teachers, but particularly those who are sole charge teachers of English at their schools, or for teachers at schools such as Pīwakawaka who find little support amongst the staff and instead provide the support for others. Evidence suggests that the significance of differentiated ability, or knowledge levels, of collaborative partners is not as important as the quality of the collaborative interaction itself (Maftoon & Ghafoori, 2009). Having any kind of collaborator, regardless of their own experience, has a positive impact.

The participants also highlight informal discussions within schools around texts and their teaching, addressing problems that may arise, and clarifications of understanding. Such informal discussions would not be possible for sole charge teachers, or those such as Pīwakawaka, further supporting structured opportunities for collaboration.

An additional consideration in the findings is the reported benefits from relationships with tertiary lecturers and teachers. Because of Pīwakawaka's conscious effort to conduct and

complete extramural study in tikanga and te reo Māori, she has formed connections with experts that she is able to draw on in collaboration and support of her teaching. While this is a fantastic resource, such collaboration is not able to be replicated in schools in general and cannot be a generalised support for teachers. This also raises the issue of Māori teachers being tasked with the burden of carrying the cultural labour in school environments (Turner-Adams & Rubie-Davies, 2023). Described as cultural taxation (Padilla, 1994), Māori educators often feel obliged to act as consultant and advisor to their non-Māori colleagues, in which they must "upskill" them, providing education, support and advice when asked (Torepe et al., 2018, p. 55). Māori teachers report feeling a sense of duty to carry out this extra unexpected and unpaid workload, often leaving them feeling burnt out, or unable to meet their own high professional standards. While the value of colleague collaboration and support is clearly established in this study, non-Māori teachers do need to be mindful to the extent to which they exert these pressures on Māori colleagues and consider if such collaboration is putting undue burden on their colleagues. This also calls for explorations of better, more robust support pathways for teachers to find colleagues they can collaborate with around teaching Māori texts. Such pathways should be formalised to ensure colleagues are being fairly compensated such as through professional development opportunities like TupuOra or subject association networks.

5.3.4 Culturally Responsive Practices of Vulnerability and Resilience

This research builds on existing scholarship by highlighting teacher vulnerability and resilience as deliberate, enabling acts central to culturally responsive practice. These two practices emerge as both strategic levers key and enabling mechanisms in the finding. The dual uses of vulnerability – in which teachers acknowledge limits to knowledge base and display a genuine willingness to be challenged or corrected – and resilience – a commitment from

teachers to engage with texts, content and conversation despite previous discomfort, paralysis and unsettling – is a recurring, essential element across the narratives.

Initially, when analysing my data and identifying reoccurring patterns, I framed teacher vulnerability and resilience as dispositions the participants held, assuming that they were innate qualities the teachers held. However, as the refining process continued and returned to the data, I began to see clearly in the narratives the intentionality and the volition in what the participants described. The teachers in this study make deliberate choices in their teaching practice to publicly demonstrate vulnerability, which researcher Brene Brown defines as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (Grant, 2021, 3:00), when they acknowledge their lack of expertise and content gaps in Māori concepts and Māori perspectives when teaching Māori texts. Additionally, they practice deliberate resilience, adapting and recovering in the face of adverse situations (Salvo-Garrido et al., 2025) when challenged, or when they make mistakes. The following sections will show how the participants choose to act in these ways, and how such practice is essential to their embodying of culturally responsive practice.

5.3.4.1 Teacher Vulnerability as a Deliberate Culturally Responsive Act

Each participant engaged in acts of vulnerability in similar ways, entering their teaching of Māori texts from a place of honesty and transparency. The teachers position themselves as learners alongside their ākonga, and in instances where their teaching or understanding fails to engage deeply or is incorrect, they are open to the feedback of students. Kākā says "I think that I acknowledge my privilege, I acknowledge to the students that I am not Māori, and I am still learning and that it's a journey that we are all on together..."

This is a deliberate, sustained act by the teachers that can feel counterintuitive in the hierarchal environment of high schools, where subject specialist teachers are expected to occupy the role of "expert". As Paulo Freire asserts in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000), traditional models of education positions learning as a top-down process in which teachers are

enlightened, knowledgeable and active agents, while students are ignorant and passive objects. In this unidirectional dynamic, it is the student alone who needs to raise their “consciousness”, with academic power holders retaining “specialization and elitism” (Kishimoto, 2018, p. 544). As such, academia “does not encourage humility" (Kishimoto, 2018, p. 544). This traditional authoritarian view of education persists, and as such teachers may find engaging in acts of humility, and vulnerability, an extremely uncomfortable position to put themselves into in its challenging of the “expert” label. As this study highlights, vulnerability in the classroom admits that there are gaps in the teachers’ knowledge, outlines that mistakes and errors may be made, and positions, in some classrooms, students in places of power over the teacher in terms of knowledge and understanding. To instantiate this, Kea says:

> It’s something new and you’re worried as a teacher – I’m supposed to be the authority and am I going to get this right and really changing that dynamic that actually you’re not always the authority, sometimes someone in the class will be the authority.

When Pākehā teachers choose to engage in vulnerability during their teaching of Māori texts, it displaces the traditional relationship between student and teacher in which the teacher is the knowledge holder and gate keeper, transmitting this knowledge to the students, while the student sits passively as a vessel – empty, or at least lacking knowledge. Teacher vulnerability disrupts the hierarchy by acknowledging that knowledge is not solely held by teachers, and that students are not inherently vessels but their own repositories of existing knowing (Freire, 2000). Vulnerability invites conversation rather than transmission, power sharing rather than power hoarding, and in doing can build a sense of community for ākonga (Kishimoto, 2018). Therefore, teachers deliberately engaging in acts of vulnerability when teaching Māori texts is clearly a form of culturally responsive practice. The power sharing between teachers and ākonga enacts the culturally responsive vision that Bishop et al. lay out in *Te Kotahitanga* (2003). Power sharing allows learning that embodies the Māori concept of ako, that which is reciprocal and non-hierarchical. It encourages all participants’ learning to be valued and fostered, all learners

are empowered to initiate learning, and all have a right to self-determination over how they learn. It is then unsurprising that studies find power sharing between teachers and students lead to higher rates of ākonga engagement, satisfaction and achievement (de Bie et al., 2019; Donohue-Bergeler et al., 2018; Kurczek & Johnson, 2014), with students valuing themselves as “knowers” (de Bie et al., 2019, p. 40). Additionally, de Bie et al find this especially true for students who belong to historically marginalised communities whose knowledge has been consistently undervalued.

Further to this, as Kishimoto writes: “To admit that the faculty are ‘also in the process of learning’ ... is a political act” (2018, p. 544). When viewed through this lens, deliberate vulnerability when engaging with Māori perspectives and knowledge in Māori texts can be seen as supporting decolonial and indigenising practice in the classroom. Classrooms are indigenised with the use of Māori texts themselves, as the learning is foregrounding Māori knowledge and experience (Brunette-Debassige & Wakeham, 2020). But to decolonise, colonial systems and structures must be displaced. Decolonisation requires the unsettling of longstanding methods of teaching that privilege the few, and that unsettling requires vulnerability. The space the teachers make to empower students to lead, drawing from collective knowledge and encouraging and asserting that learning can come from the group allows the teachers' classrooms to become sites of clear, evidential decolonial practice. As Kea acknowledges, this drawing from “collective knowledge” returns to "that te ao Māori, the way of teaching, there may be a guide, there may be a kaumatua, but the learning can come from the group so that’s very different.”

5.3.4.2 Teacher Resilience as a Deliberate Culturally Responsive Act

In partnership with culturally responsive acts of vulnerability, this study shows a secondary layer of culturally responsive practice in intentional and deliberate acts of resilience when facing anxieties, discomforts, and uncertainties in their teaching. This is a sequential and connected approach to culturally responsive teaching. Once teacher vulnerability is admitted,

shared, and considered, it then must be worked through. To illustrate this, Kea verbalises the idea of text “consolidation”, with the general understanding being that the first year teaching a text is a little like the first pancake on the skillet – not your best work. However, with time and, to take the metaphor a little further, with testing the temperature and equipment at their disposal, teachers are able to work out a methodology and practice, calibrating over time until the teaching of the text vastly improves. This mindset is true of all texts, but with Māori texts comes the working through cultural vulnerabilities, such as those detailed by Hotere-Barnes of a "fear of getting it wrong” (2015, p. 41) or misunderstanding the text, engaging in tokenistic teaching of the text and its related concepts, and uncertainty of the correct response or action when ākonga ask challenging questions. This discomfort can lead teachers to find teaching cultural content, such as Māori texts, too difficult and consequently avoid or reject responsibilities to engage in cultural complexity. It would be easy to drop a text that puts a teacher in a place of discomfort out of a learning programme. It is much harder to continue to use such texts knowing what difficulties may be around the corner in the classroom. As such, when the teachers in this study know the difficulties, but continue to actively and intentionally engage with them in publicly vulnerable ways, they develop a sense of resilience that allows them to sustain long-term culturally responsive teaching. Resilience can be defined by the ability of teachers to “adapt and recover in the face of adverse situations” (Salvo-Garrido et al., 2025). Such an ability is exhibited by participants in this study throughout the narratives in moments where mistakes are made and they are able to pivot quickly in the classroom to acknowledge the issue, address it but also keep the learning on track or “recover”. Kākā further illustrates:

> ...if someone tells me I’m wrong, I’m going to say “Yeah, cool, thank you, I’m going to fix that” ... I’m also someone who will go, “Hey, we need to take a step back and look at this because something’s gone wrong here”.

It must be noted that resilience building in teachers is not an easy exercise (Salvo-Garrido et al., 2025). There are multiple dimensions to resilience that are shaped by both individual and

contextual factors, such as social, professional, emotional and motivational circumstances (Mullen et al., 2021). Research shows that strategies that can cultivate resilience in teachers include coaching, mentoring, professional development opportunities, collaboration, and effective induction. Such evidence supports many of the other areas of discussion in thesis, specifically in findings around the barriers that teachers face. These resilience building factors suggest that Initial Teacher Education induction programmes, and teacher collaboration and its related resourcing, such as professional development opportunities, need to be more robust in order to strengthen the capacity of teachers to not only develop knowledge and network, but to grow resilience in order to better practice the vulnerability needed to enact culturally responsive teaching consistently and long-term.

These two interconnected and enabling acts of culturally responsive practice are fundamental to understanding the ways in which the participants navigate the complexities and challenges of teaching of Māori texts in the classroom.

Chapter Six: Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

This research shows the realities of a profession largely trying to engage meaningfully with Māori works. Kaiako have a deep desire to authentically and ethically engage with Māori texts, uphold Te Tiriti, embed Māori knowledge in the classroom, and support the aspirations and achievement of all students, especially ākonga Māori. However, they often find little support in their ability to do so. Scholarship has been limited in this space, and teachers have been left with ambiguous guidelines and expectations in many areas of enacting the teaching of Māori-authored and Māori-focused texts. This study identifies crucial gaps in support stemming from inadequate preparation, personal anxieties, and systemic challenges such as ambiguity and resourcing. As such, it highlights areas of further development in teacher preparation and development at a systemic level. This study also acknowledges the ways teachers adapt in order to effectively teach Māori works, encouraging new pathways of exploration for teacher practices of culturally responsive pedagogy through centring vulnerability and resilience.

In the span of time from when this study began to when it concluded, including Māori texts at secondary schools has gone from being highly encouraged in the 2024 Te Mātaiaho draft, sidelined and almost forgotten in the early 2025 curriculum draft, before Māori-authored texts ultimately becoming “must” include texts in the final curriculum document. The way these texts are treated reflects the way society at large is grappling with mātauranga Māori, and efforts to move this taonga, protected by Te Tiriti, out of a secondary, subordinate categorisation of knowledge. Māori texts are essential – but a teacher who has gone through our current Initial Teacher Education system, with low levels of colleague support, and minimal exposure to culturally responsive practice will inevitably feel anxieties, perhaps paralysis, when teaching the Māori-authored works they now *must* teach.

The implications of this research are clear. Systemic change is needed specifically in ITE with explicit teaching of Māori world views and the practices of teaching mātauranga

centred. The Ministry of Education's resourcing is also currently insufficient. Clear, accessible guidelines and information in Ministry documents is needed to remove ambiguity. Funding is needed to support resourcing on the individual school level. Further, kaiako need funding and opportunities to collaborate within and across schools.

This work to support teachers is especially crucial when considering that while there are many Pākehā and non-Māori kaiako actively engaging with Māori texts with good intent, there are others who for one reason or another have not been as enthusiastic as their colleagues about the teaching of these texts. With the mandating of Māori-authored texts, the reality is that there will be some teachers who will not have the knowledge, the capacity, or the interest to engage with them in a culturally appropriate way. What impacts this then has on Māori and non-Māori sense of belonging, self-value, critical thinking, and achievement is worthy of further consideration.

This research was conducted with as much care as possible, but the limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, this study represents the views of only six teachers within the teaching profession. While this is of a significant size for a Masters project of this scope, it cannot be considered to incorporate the views of all Pākehā teachers currently teaching secondary English. Researcher bias must also be acknowledged. As the narratives were restoried through my eyes, and thematic analysis was compiled through my own lens, there will be an inherent bias in the areas of the pūrākau I found most relevant and the themes that explicitly emerged to me. This work was originally designed to look at the views of non-Māori teachers, however the participants are exclusively Pākehā, as a result of being those who responded to the call out. Māori teachers' perspectives have also been omitted from this research. As such, further scholarship could look at a widening of scope to include the perspectives of Māori and non-Pākehā teachers. This study champions teacher narratives, but to do so comes at the expense of student voice on the efficacy of Māori text. Research looking at student perspectives and experiences of Māori texts could be a further area of exploration on this topic.

This research sought to add to the limited literature on the inclusion of Māori texts and mātauranga Māori in the English classroom. It has done so, but this work is not done. It remains relevant, contemporary and pressing, especially in this contested political landscape where mātauranga Māori faces immense opposition. Further research is imperative to continue demonstrating the need for Māori voice and perspective in our classrooms, and to develop teacher capacity to do so in truly culturally responsive and sustaining ways.

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Appendix A: Glossary

Aho – strand

Ākonga – student

Harakeke – flax

Kai – food or sustenance

Kaiako – teacher

Karakia – prayer

Kete – bag

Kura – School

Mana – honour, pride and esteem

Mātauranga – knowledge, wisdom, skill, understanding

Manaakitanga – hospitality or generosity

Pepeha – formulaic expression, introductory speech

Pou – pillar

Pūrākau – story

Rourou – small, flax woven food basket

Tangata – people

Tangata Tiriti – people of the treaty

Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi

Te ao Māori – the Māori world

Tohu – sign

Waiata – song

Whānau – family

Wero – challenge

Whakapapa – genealogy

Whakataukī – Māori proverb

Appendix B: Text List

The following are the texts mentioned by the participants in their interviews as being Māori texts that either have been, or are being, taught in classrooms:

Māori Works

Poems and Poetry Collections

Juliette Lewis wears a Piupiu by Nicole Titihuia Hawkins
Rain by Hone Tuwhare
Flood by Hone Tuwhare
Always Italicise: How to Write While Colonised by Alice Te Punga Somerville
Parihaka by Apirana Taylor

Short Stories

Ka Kite, Bro by Willie Davis
The Pupu Pool by Witi Ihimaera
The Seahorse and the Reef by Witi Ihimaera
Butterflies by Patricia Grace
A Game of Cards by Witi Ihimaera
Sad Joke on a Marae by Witi Ihimaera
The children of Church Street by Airana Ngārewa

Extended Texts

The Pōrangi Boy by Shilo Kino
How to Loiter in a Turf War by Coco Solid
Nine Girls by Stacy Gregg
The Whale Rider by Witi Ihimaera
Flight of the Fantail by Steph Matuku
Bugs by Whiti Hereaka
White Lies, Māori Legends and Fairytales by Falstaff Dowling-Mitchell
Auē by Becky Manawatu
Potiki by Patricia Grace
Legacy by Whiti Hereaka
Better the Blood by Michael Bennett
The Mires by Tina Makereti
Where the Rēkohu Bone Sings by Tina Makereti
Pounamu, Pounamu by Witi Ihimaera
Bulibasha: King of the Gypsies by Witi Ihimaera

Cousins by Patricia Grace
The Bone Tiki by David Hair
The Taniwha's Tear by David Hair
Once Were Warriors by Alan Duff
The Bone People by Keri Hulme

Films

Once Were Warriors directed by Lee Tamahori
Uproar directed by Paul Middleditch and Hamish Bennett
The Dark Horse directed by James Napier Robertson
Jojo Rabbit directed by Taika Waititi
Hunt for the Wilderpeople directed by Taika Waititi

Miscellaneous

Parihaka [Song] – Tim Finn
The Pohutukawa Tree [Play] – Bruce Mason

Māori Authors Mentioned

Witi Ihimaera
Patricia Grace
Hone Tuwhare
Alice Te Punga Somerville
essa may ranapiri
Nic Low
Whiti Hereaka
Tina Makereti
Lindsey Hera Bird

Additionally, these texts have been used for professional development of teacher capacity:

Professional Development Texts

Niho Taniwha: Improving Teaching and Learning for Ākonga Māori by Melanie Riwai-Crouch

Teaching to the North-East: Relationship-based Learning in Practice by Russell Bishop

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Participant Information Sheet

Project Title: Nāku te Rourou: Exploring Non-Māori Teachers' Experiences with Māori Texts in English Classrooms

Researcher: Kashka Tunstall

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Introduction:

Kia ora koutou,

My name is Kashka Tunstall and I am a Master of Education student at the University of Waikato. I am conducting research exploring how non-Māori teachers incorporate Māori texts in English classrooms. This research aims to understand the strategies teachers employ, the challenges and supports they encounter, and their overall experiences and perspectives on teaching these works. Your participation in this study would be invaluable.

Purpose of the Research:

In Aotearoa New Zealand, integrating Māori literature and perspectives into English classrooms is vital for fostering cultural inclusivity and achieving the goals of the new NCEA curriculum. While the importance of Indigenous texts in education is well-documented, there is a need to better understand how non-Māori educators perceive and approach teaching these works. This research seeks to address this gap and explore how to support teachers in navigating the complexities of teaching Māori texts ethically, effectively, and authentically.

What I Am Inquiring About:

1. What strategies do non-Māori teachers employ to incorporate Māori texts in English classrooms, and what are the barriers and facilitators influencing their practice?
2. What are non-Māori teachers' experiences and perspectives on teaching Māori texts in English classrooms?

Invitation to Participate:

I am seeking non-Māori English teachers who have taught students in Years 9-13 in the Waikato region within the last two years and have included texts by Māori authors/creators in their teaching. I would like to interview 4-8 participants with diverse backgrounds in terms of teaching experience, school setting, and exposure to Māori texts. Participants will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis. If the first applicants have very similar profiles, I will select from the first respondents to ensure diversity.

Benefits:

I expect the results of this project will contribute to a better understanding of how non-Māori teachers approach the teaching of Māori texts. This information will be useful for teachers, teacher educators, and curriculum developers in supporting culturally responsive teaching practices.

Duration and Procedures:

If you agree to participate, you will be involved in the research process from June until August. The participation would require the following:

- Initial Contact: A brief phone call or email exchange (approx. 30 minutes) to discuss the project in more detail and confirm your interest.
- Reading and Signing Consent Form: Reviewing and signing this information sheet and the consent form (approx. 15 minutes).
- Interview: A 90-minute interview conducted in person or online. The location will be based on your preference. Interviews will be audio-recorded.
- Transcript Review: Reviewing and approving a transcript of your interview (approx. 1 hour).
- Follow-up: A brief phone call or email (approx. 10 minutes) a week after the interview to see if you have any further thoughts to add.

This would in total require approximately 3 hours and 30 minutes of your time.

I am seeking to interview participants from June through July, and will have transcripts available by August to review.

Participation:

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time, up until you approve your transcript of the interview (up to two weeks from data collection). Every effort will be made to minimise any potential discomfort or stress associated with discussing your experiences. You are welcome to decline to answer any questions you prefer not to.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of your information is guaranteed throughout the entire duration of this research. At no time will your name be recorded or made public in any of the research, and no links will be made between your responses in the interviews that would identify you. If the information that you provide in your interviews is published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source. I will be the only one transcribing the interviews. All data collected will be treated confidentially. You will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your anonymity as much as is possible. All data, including transcripts and audio recordings, will be stored securely. Your consent form will be stored separately from the interview data.

Disputes

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research, please contact me in the first instance. If the issue is not resolved, you can contact my supervisors, Dr. Emma Cunningham or Dr. Hoana McMillan.

Use of Information

The information gathered will be used for my Master of Education thesis and may also be used for scholarly publications and presentations. No identifying information will be included in any publications or presentations.

Access to Results

You will have the opportunity to review your interview transcript. The findings of the research will be available upon completion of the study through the University of Waikato Research Commons. You will be notified when the thesis is available.

Cultural and Social Considerations:

This research acknowledges the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and aims to be culturally sensitive. Cultural advice will be sought if any cultural considerations arise during the research process.

Contact Information for Complaints:

In the first instance, please contact me using my email kt72@waikato.students.ac.nz or via my phone number. If the matter is not resolved, please contact my supervisors:

Dr. Emma Cunningham: emma.cunningham@waikato.ac.nz | Dr. Hoana McMillan: hoana.mcmillan@waikato.ac.nz

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This research has been approved by The University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on [Date]. Approval number: FEDU018/25.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Participant Consent Form

Project Title: Nāku te Rourou: Exploring Non-Māori Teachers' Experiences with Māori Texts in English Classrooms

Researcher: Kashka Tunstall

Please tick the boxes to indicate your agreement:

- ☐ I have read and understood the information sheet about this research project.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time up until I approve my transcript of the interview (up to two weeks from data collection).
- ☐ I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded.
- ☐ I understand how the information I provide will be used and stored.
- ☐ I understand that while every effort will be made to protect my anonymity, this cannot be guaranteed.
- ☐ I consent to the use of a pseudonym to protect my identity.
- ☐ I understand my right to access the research findings.
- ☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.
- ☐ I agree to participate in this research project.

Participant Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

Researcher Name:

Researcher Signature:

Date:

Contact Information for Complaints:

In the first instance, please contact me using my email kt72@waikato.students.ac.nz or via my phone number. If the matter is not resolved, please contact my supervisors:

Dr. Emma Cunningham: emma.cunningham@waikato.ac.nz | Dr. Hoana McMillan: hoana.mcmillan@waikato.ac.nz

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This research has been approved by The University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 06/06/2025. Approval number: FEDU018/25.