

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

# **Cultivating Te Ao Māori in Mainstream School Environments: Empowering Cultural Responsiveness**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the post-graduate degree  
of

Master of Education In  
Māori Education

At Massey University, Te Papa-i-oea, Manawatū, Aotearoa, New Zealand

Jordyn Hasson

2026

## NGĀ MIHI: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**E aku whānau aroha** — Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa.

Thank you for your unconditional love, patience, and belief in me. Your support has been my foundation, my reminder of who I am and where I come from. To my parents, siblings, niece and nephew — e mihi ana au mō tō koutou tautoko me tō koutou aroha. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

**Ōku Tipuna** — for being my guides throughout my journey of rediscovering and embracing my Māoritanga. Your presence has been felt in every step, every word, and every heartbeat of this mahi.

**Te whānau Hēnare** — Peeni, Kimiora, and Mānuka, thank you for paving the way as the next generation comes through, especially as an educator. Your leadership and example have inspired my own journey in education, and Te Ao me te reo Māori.

**Timu and Huia** — Ngā mihi nui ki a kōrua for your guidance, patience, and unwavering encouragement throughout this thesis journey. Your support has shaped both the mahi and the person I have become, grounding this kaupapa in care, integrity, and purpose.

**Darren Powell** — Ngā mihi nui ki a koe, for believing in me from day one, for seeing my potential as a wahine Māori educator, and for encouraging me to stand confidently in who I am and the mahi I do.

**Navarone, e taku tau** — Thank you for being the pou through all the hard moments, for celebrating every small victory, and for always reminding me of how far I've come. Ko koe taku taurima, taku pou herenga waka. You are my strength when I need it. This journey, this thesis, and every step of growth along the way has been carried by your love and belief in me. E kore rawa e warewaretia tō aroha, tō manawanui, me tō tautoko. He taonga koe.

Ngā mihi maioha ki a koutou katoa — this mahi is not mine alone; it is carried by the love, belief, and legacy of all those who stand beside me, behind me, and those yet to come.

*Mauri ora*

## NGĀ IHIRANGI: TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Cover Page</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Ngā Mihi: Acknowledgements</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Ngā Ihirangi: Table of Contents</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Kuputaka: Glossary</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Tuhinga Whakarāpopototanga: Abstract</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Chapter 1: He Kupu Whakataki: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 The Purpose of this Kaupapa</b>	
<b>Chapter 2: Arotake Tuhinga Literature Review</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b>	
2.1.1 Scope of Literature Review	
<b>2.1.2 Key Definitions</b>	
<b>Primary Theoretical Frameworks</b>	
Kaupapa Māori Theory	
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy	
<b>Supporting Concepts</b>	
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	
Cultural Paralysis	
<b>2.2 Theoretical Foundations to Culturally Responsive Teaching</b>	
<b>2.3 Key Principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching</b>	
2.3.1 Cultural Competence	
2.3.2 High Expectations	
2.3.3 Cultural Relevance	
2.3.4 Community Collaboration	
2.3.5 Reflective Practice	
<b>2.4 Challenges in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching</b>	
2.4.1 Te Kotahitanga: A Model for Culturally Responsive Teaching	
2.4.2 He Kākano: Culturally Responsive Leadership in Practice	

## **2.5 Ongoing Barriers and Considerations**

2.5.1 Deficiencies in Institutional Support

2.5.2 Language and Communication Challenges

2.5.3 Gaps in Teacher Training and Professional Development

2.5.4 Additional Barriers (Workload, Emotional Labour, and Bias)

## **2.6 Summary**

## **Chapter 3: Tikanga Rangahau: Methodology**

**18**

### **3.1 Introduction**

### **3.2 Research Paradigm and Theoretical Framework**

3.2.1 Kaupapa Māori Paradigm

### **3.2.2 Culturally Responsive Teaching, Critical Theory, and Transformative Pedagogy**

### **3.3 Research Design**

3.3.1 Participant Recruitment

3.3.2 Data Collection

3.3.3 Interpretive Analysis

3.3.4 Validation and Feedback

### **3.4 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality**

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

3.5.1 Informed Consent

3.5.2 Confidentiality and Data Security

3.5.3 Cultural and Relational Ethics

### **3.6 Summary**

## **Chapter 4: Ngā Kitenga: Findings**

**30**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Table 4.1.1- Themes and subthemes

### **4.2 Theme 1: Whanaungatanga (Relationships and Connections)**

4.2.1 Sub-Theme 1: Teacher-Whānau Engagement and Everyday Trust

4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2: Whānau as Partners in Learning

4.2.3 Sub-Theme 3: Belonging and Collective Responsibility

### **4.3 Theme 2: Normalising Te Reo Māori me Tikanga Māori**

- 4.3.1 Sub-Theme 1: Embedding Tikanga through Routine
- 4.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: Te Reo Māori as an Everyday Language
- 4.3.3 Sub-Theme 3: Celebrating Cultural Events
- 4.3.4 Sub-theme 4: Te Tiriti and Curricular Commitment

#### **4.4 Theme 3: Student Agency and Tuakiritanga (Identity)**

- 4.4.1 Sub-Theme 1: Culturally Grounded Confidence
- 4.4.2 Sub-Theme 2: Student Leadership in Haka me Waiaata
- 4.4.3 Sub-Theme 3: Valuing Multiple Identities

#### **4.5 Theme 4: Systemic Barriers and Support**

- 4.5.1 Sub-Theme 1: Leadership and Resourcing
- 4.5.2 Sub-Theme 2: Tokenism
- 4.5.3 Sub-Theme 3: Curriculum Constraints and Time Pressures
- 4.5.4 Sub-Theme 4: Lack of whānau engagement

#### **4.6 Theme 5: Teacher Growth and Reflective Practice**

- 4.6.1 Sub-Theme 1: Learning Through Professional Development
- 4.6.2 Sub-Theme 2: Learning Through Whanaungatanga
- 4.6.3 Sub-Theme: Reflective Practice

#### **4.7 Summary**

## **Chapter 5: Matapaki: Discussion**

52

### **5.1 Introduction**

### **5.2 Interpreting Key Themes Through Kaupapa Māori Theory**

- 5.2.1 Whanaungatanga: Relationships as the Heart of Pedagogy
- 5.2.2 Normalising Te Reo Māori me ōna Tikanga: From Tokenism to Everyday Practice
- 5.2.3 Student Agency and Identity: Tino Rangatiratanga in Action
- 5.2.4 Systemic Barriers and Support: Negotiating Tension and Tokenism
- 5.2.5 Teacher Growth and Reflective Practice: Ako as Transformation

### **5.3 Alignment with Literature and Theory**

- 5.3.1 Relational Pedagogy
- 5.3.2 Language and Cultural Revitalisation
- 5.3.3 Agency and Identity

5.3.4 Systemic Barriers

5.3.5 Reflective Practice

## **5.4 Implications for Practice and Policy**

5.4.1 For Kaiako

5.4.2 For Leadership and Schools

5.4.3 For Policy and System

## **5.5 Summary**

**Chapter 6: Kupu Whakapi: Conclusion** **72**

**Rārangi Tohutoro: Reference List** **74**

**Ngā Āpitianga: Appendices** **79**

Appendix A: Letter to Principals

Appendix B: Prospective Participant Information Sheet

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

## KUPUTAKA: GLOSSARY

Ākonga	Learners. In this research, ākonga refers to all students in mainstream primary classrooms, with particular attention to Māori learners and their experiences.
Ako	A reciprocal process of teaching and learning, where both kaiako and ākonga learn from one another.
Aroha	Love, compassion, and care for others, underpinning relational approaches in teaching.
Aroha-ki-te-tangata	Respect for people, emphasising care, empathy, and relational responsibility.
Aotearoa	New Zealand, the cultural and geographical context of this research.
Haerenga	Journey. Used to describe personal, professional, or learning journeys.
Hapori	Community, including the wider social and cultural groups connected to learners and schools.
Hauora	Holistic wellbeing, encompassing physical, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions.
He Kaupapa tuku iho	An inherited purpose or intergenerational responsibility carried through whakapapa.
Hui	Meeting or gathering, often for discussion, decision-making, or connection.
Kaiako	Teachers. In this research, kaiako refers to all teachers within mainstream primary schools, not exclusively Māori teachers.
Kaimahi	Colleagues or staff members within a workplace or organisation.
Kanohi-ki-te-kanohi	Face-to-Face interaction, emphasising the importance of relational connection.
Karakia	Prayer or incantation used to open and close spaces, providing spiritual grounding.
Kaupapa	Agenda/Topic, purpose, or collective agenda guiding an activity or research.
Kāwanatanga	Governance. In the context of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, kāwanatanga refers to the authority granted to the Crown to govern, while maintaining responsibility to ensure equitable systems and outcomes. In this research, it relates to how educational

	institutions exercise authority in ways that uphold equity for Māori learners.
Kete	Basket. Often used metaphorically to represent knowledge or resources.
Koha	Gift or contribution, often given as a gesture of respect or reciprocity.
Kōrero	Talk, discussion, or conversation.
Kotahitanga	Unity and collective responsibility, working together towards a shared purpose.
Kupu Māori	Māori words or language.
Kura	School. In this study, refers to mainstream primary school settings.
Matariki	Māori New Year, marked by the rising of the Matariki star cluster and associated with renewal and reflection.
Mana	Prestige, authority, and spiritual power, often linked to identity and relationships.
Manaakitanga	Care, respect, and hospitality, expressed through actions that uplift the mana of others.
Mana Motuhake	Autonomy, self-determination, and independence.
Māori	Indigenous People of Aotearoa New Zealand.
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge systems, including cultural values, beliefs, and ways of knowing.
Marae Ātea	the Domain of Tūmataunga. The open space in front of a wharenuī, traditionally used for formal speech and debate.
Mauri	Life force or vital essence present in people, places, and objects.
Ōritetanga	Equality and Balance, particularly in relation to fairness and equity.
Pūrākau	Narrative or storytelling, often used to convey knowledge, values, and history.
Rohe	Region or area, often connected to iwi or hapū boundaries.
Tamariki	Children
Taonga	Treasure, something highly valued, including people, language, and culture.

Tauira	Student. Often used interchangeably with ākonga, though can refer more specifically to individual learners.
Te Ao Māori	Māori worldview, encompassing Māori perspectives, values, and ways of being.
Teina	Younger brother (of a male), younger sister (of a female), cousin (of the same gender) of a junior line, junior relative.
Te Reo Māori	Māori Language. An official language of Aotearoa, New Zealand
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty of Waitangi, the founding agreement of Aotearoa New Zealand. In this research, Te Tiriti provides a framework guiding culturally responsive and equitable education practices, particularly in relation to partnership, participation, and protection.
Tikanga	Māori cultural practices, values, and protocols that guide behaviour, relationships, and ways of being.
Tino Rangatiratanga	Self-determination and autonomy. In an educational context, this refers to the ability of Māori learners to have agency, voice, and control over their learning and identity.
Tuakana	Older sibling or more experienced person, often used in tuakana–teina relationships to support learning.
Tuakiritanga	Identity. Refers to the cultural, social, and personal identity of learners, particularly the affirmation of Māori identity in education.
Wānanga	A process of deep learning, discussion, and knowledge sharing, often in a collaborative and culturally grounded setting.
Whānau	Family. In this research, whānau extends beyond immediate family to include wider relational networks connected to learners and schools.
Waiata	Song, often used in educational and cultural contexts to support learning, identity, and connection.
Wairua	Spirit or spiritual essence. Refers to the spiritual dimension of wellbeing and connection within individuals and spaces.
Whakawhanaungatanga	The process of building and maintaining meaningful relationships and connections.
Whakamā	A feeling of shyness, embarrassment, or discomfort, often linked to cultural or social context.
Whakapapa	Genealogy and ancestral connections. Refers to the relationships that connect individuals to their ancestors, identity, and place.

## **TUHINGA WHAKARĀPOPOTOTANGA: ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores how kaiako in mainstream primary school settings across Aotearoa understand and enact culturally responsive practice grounded in te ao Māori. Situated within ongoing inequities experienced by Māori learners in the education system, this study examines the relational, cultural, and systemic conditions that influence the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Guided by Kaupapa Māori theory and informed by culturally sustaining pedagogy, this research centres Māori worldviews, values, and aspirations as foundational to teaching and learning. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with eight kaiako working in mainstream primary schools. The research prioritised relational and culturally grounded approaches, including whakawhanaungatanga and participant validation, to uphold the mana of all contributors. Findings reveal five interconnected themes: the centrality of whanaungatanga in teaching practice; the normalisation of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga; the importance of fostering student agency and cultural identity; the impact of systemic barriers; and the ongoing reflective growth of kaiako. These findings demonstrate that culturally responsive practice is deeply relational and requires sustained commitment at both individual and systemic levels. This study contributes to the field of Māori education by providing insight into how culturally responsive pedagogy is enacted within mainstream schooling contexts. It highlights the ways in which kaiako can support Māori learners to experience education as affirming, empowering, and reflective of their identity as Māori, while also offering practical implications for teachers, schools, and the wider education system.

## **CHAPTER 1- HE KUPU WHAKATAKI: INTRODUCTION**

In Aotearoa New Zealand, educational excellence extends beyond academic achievement to include a commitment to recognising and valuing the diverse cultural identities of learners (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2013). From a te ao Māori perspective, education is inherently relational and grounded in principles such as whanaungatanga (relationships and connections), manaakitanga (care and respect), and ako (reciprocal learning), which collectively support the holistic development of ākonga (Macfarlane, 2004; Smith, 2012). Within this framework, education is understood not simply as the transmission of knowledge, but as a relational and culturally located process shaped by identity, language, and shared meaning-making. Culturally responsive pedagogy has been widely recognised as an approach that affirms the cultural identities, languages, and lived experiences of learners, positioning these as central to teaching and learning (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). In the Aotearoa context, this requires kaiako to move beyond surface-level inclusion and engage in meaningful, sustained relationships with te ao Māori and te reo Māori. Such practice involves recognising and honouring the whakapapa of each learner and ensuring that identity is affirmed within the classroom environment. This commitment aligns closely with the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Article 1 (kāwanatanga) emphasises the responsibility of the education system to exercise governance in ways that promote equity; Article 2 (tino rangatiratanga) affirms the protection of Māori language, culture, and identity; and Article 3 (ōritetanga) ensures equitable outcomes for all learners. Within this context, culturally responsive practice is not optional, but a Tiriti-based responsibility that requires educators and institutions to actively uphold these commitments in ways that enable Māori success as Māori. Despite this, research continues to highlight persistent inequities experienced by Māori learners within the education system, including disparities in achievement, engagement, and wellbeing (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2013).

In response, culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies have been identified as critical approaches for addressing these inequities, as they centre the identities, languages, and cultural knowledge of learners within teaching practice (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Averill & McRae, 2019). Within the Aotearoa context, these approaches are further

strengthened by Kaupapa Māori theory, which positions Māori knowledge, values, and aspirations as foundational to educational transformation (Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2010).

While existing literature establishes the importance of culturally responsive practice, there remains limited understanding of how kaiako in mainstream primary school settings enact these approaches in their everyday teaching contexts. In particular, there is a need to better understand how kaiako interpret, navigate, and sustain culturally responsive practices within the constraints and opportunities of mainstream schooling environments.

### ***1.1 The Purpose of This Kaupapa***

The purpose of this kaupapa is to examine how kaiako in mainstream primary schools across Aotearoa understand and enact culturally responsive practice grounded in te ao Māori, and to identify the conditions that support or constrain this practice. This study is guided by the research question: *How do kaiako in mainstream primary schools conceptualise and enact culturally responsive practice grounded in te ao Māori?*

This research aims to contribute to the development of culturally responsive practice within mainstream primary school settings by providing insight into the experiences of kaiako and the ways in which they navigate this work in their everyday teaching contexts. In doing so, it responds to calls within the literature for more contextually grounded understandings of culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies in practice (Averill & McRae, 2019; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). The study is intended to benefit kaiako working within mainstream primary school contexts, while also contributing to improved educational experiences and outcomes for Māori learners. Although the findings may have relevance for all ākonga, the primary focus remains on supporting Māori success as Māori. More broadly, this kaupapa seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about how mainstream schooling in Aotearoa can better uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and enact educational practices that are equitable, culturally sustaining, and responsive to the aspirations of Māori learners and their whānau.

This study is primarily intended to benefit Māori learners by exploring how culturally sustaining practices can better support their success as Māori within English-medium schooling. At the same time, it recognises that culturally sustaining approaches create more inclusive and effective learning environments for all ākonga. The research is also intended to

support kaiako by providing insight into how culturally sustaining practices can be understood and enacted within everyday classroom contexts.

## **CHAPTER 2: AROTAKE TUHINGA- LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In recent decades, culturally responsive teaching has emerged as a significant focus within educational reform in Aotearoa New Zealand, reflecting ongoing efforts to address inequities experienced by Māori learners in mainstream schooling (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Gay, 2010). At its core, culturally responsive practice positions teaching and learning as relational and culturally located, requiring kaiako to recognise and value the identities, languages, and lived experiences that ākonga bring into the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010). Within the Aotearoa context, this work is closely aligned with the obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and national policy directions that emphasise Māori success as Māori, where identity, language, and culture are central to educational achievement (Ministry of Education, 2013).

More recently, there has been a conceptual shift within the literature from culturally responsive approaches toward culturally sustaining pedagogy. This shift reflects a growing recognition that responding to culture alone is insufficient if schooling does not actively sustain and revitalise the cultural and linguistic practices of learners (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). In this sense, culturally sustaining pedagogy extends beyond inclusion, positioning te reo Māori and tikanga Māori as enduring and integral components of everyday teaching and learning practice. This literature review explores the theoretical, historical, and pedagogical foundations that underpin culturally sustaining practice within English-medium mainstream schooling in Aotearoa. It examines key theoretical frameworks, including Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy, alongside seminal Aotearoa-based initiatives such as *Te Kotahitanga* and *He Kākano*. In addition, the review considers the systemic, institutional, and relational challenges that shape kaiako practice, including issues of teacher confidence, deficit theorising, and cultural paralysis.

Through this analysis, the chapter establishes a focused and contextually grounded foundation for understanding how culturally sustaining practice can be enacted to support Māori learner success.

### ***2.1.1 Scope of Literature Review***

This literature review provides a focused and contextually grounded foundation for exploring how kaiako in English-medium mainstream primary schools understand and apply culturally sustaining practices grounded in te ao Māori. Given the wide range of research in this area, the review takes a selective approach. Rather than attempting to survey all literature related to multicultural or culturally responsive education, it prioritises research that is directly relevant to Māori educational success within the specific context of Aotearoa New Zealand. This includes research that places importance on identity, language, and culture as central to learning, consistent with national policy directions and Tiriti-based educational commitments (Ministry of Education, 2013). Conceptually, the review is anchored in two key theoretical frameworks that most closely align with the purpose of this study: Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy. Kaupapa Māori theory is positioned as the primary framework, as it centres Māori worldviews, values, and aspirations, and challenges deficit-based constructions of Māori learners within mainstream education (Smith, 1997; Pihama, 2010). Culturally sustaining pedagogy is included as a complementary framework that extends earlier culturally responsive approaches by emphasising the active sustaining and revitalisation of cultural and linguistic practices, particularly te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, within everyday schooling (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Other theoretical perspectives, such as sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy, are acknowledged but are not treated as central frameworks, as the focus of this study is more closely aligned with Indigenous and culturally sustaining approaches.

Within the Aotearoa context, this review draws on key initiatives that have shaped understandings of culturally responsive and sustaining practice in English-medium schooling. In particular, Te Kotahitanga and He Kākano are examined due to their significant contributions to improving outcomes for Māori learners through relational pedagogy and culturally responsive leadership. These initiatives are included because they provide locally developed, research-informed models of mana-enhancing practice, and demonstrate how shifts in teacher beliefs, leadership practices, and school-wide systems can influence Māori learner engagement and achievement (Bishop et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2007; Ministry of

Education, 2011). Their inclusion also reflects the importance of grounding this research in Aotearoa-based evidence, rather than relying solely on international literature.

This review also includes selected literature on barriers that are particularly relevant to kaiako working within mainstream primary contexts. These include deficit theorising, limited confidence in te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, and the influence of institutional conditions such as leadership, workload, and professional learning opportunities (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Berryman et al., 2018). In addition, the review incorporates literature relating to cultural paralysis, often described in Aotearoa as Pākehā paralysis- where fear of getting it wrong, uncertainty about cultural positioning, and concern about tokenism can constrain teacher action (Bishop, 2012). This lens is important for understanding the gap that can exist between kaiako intentions and everyday classroom practice. The scope of this review does not extend to an in-depth examination of Māori-medium education settings, such as kura kaupapa Māori, nor does it attempt to comprehensively cover all curriculum areas or general diversity frameworks. These areas are acknowledged as important but sit beyond the specific focus of this study, which is concerned with kaiako practice in English-medium mainstream primary schooling. Similarly, while leadership is considered through initiatives such as He Kākano, it is not treated as the primary focus of analysis, but rather as a contextual factor that shapes the conditions under which culturally sustaining practice can be enacted. While broader frameworks such as multicultural education, general diversity approaches, and Māori-medium education contexts are acknowledged as important, they are not explored in depth, as they fall outside the specific focus of this study on culturally sustaining practice within English-medium mainstream primary schooling.

### ***2.1.2 Defining Key Concepts***

This study is primarily guided by Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy, which together provide the central theoretical frameworks for understanding and analysing culturally responsive practice within this study. The following concepts are defined to clarify how these frameworks are applied, alongside supporting concepts that inform the study.

## **Primary Theoretical Frameworks**

### *Kaupapa Māori Theory:*

Kaupapa Māori theory is an Indigenous framework grounded in Māori worldviews, values, and aspirations. It positions Māori knowledge, language, and identity as legitimate and central within education, while actively challenging deficit constructions of Māori learners (Smith, 1997; Pihama, 2010; Cram, 2009). It is both a theoretical and methodological approach that emphasises tino rangatiratanga, relationality, and collective responsibility. Within this study, Kaupapa Māori theory provides the primary lens for understanding culturally sustaining practice and Māori success as Māori.

### *Cultural Sustaining Pedagogy:*

Culturally sustaining pedagogy extends beyond culturally responsive approaches by emphasising the ongoing maintenance and revitalisation of learners' cultural and linguistic identities (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). Rather than simply responding to culture, this approach seeks to actively sustain and strengthen it within educational contexts over time. In Aotearoa, this includes supporting the normalisation and continued use of te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and Māori ways of knowing within everyday classroom practice (Paris & Alim, 2017; May & Hill, 2020). Culturally sustaining pedagogy therefore builds on culturally responsive approaches by positioning culture not only as something to acknowledge, but as something to actively uphold and nurture.

## **Supporting Concepts**

### *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:*

Culturally responsive pedagogy refers to teaching approaches that recognise, respect, and respond to the cultural identities, experiences, and knowledge that learners bring into the classroom (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It emphasises the importance of building strong relationships, maintaining high expectations, and using culturally relevant contexts to support engagement and achievement. Within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, this includes acknowledging and integrating te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and mātauranga Māori as meaningful aspects of teaching and learning (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Ministry of

Education, 2013). Culturally responsive pedagogy therefore focuses on adapting teaching practices to better meet the needs of diverse learners.

### *Cultural Paralysis:*

Cultural paralysis refers to the hesitation or inaction experienced by kaiako due to fear of making cultural mistakes, uncertainty about appropriate practice, or concern about tokenism (Bishop, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). This concept highlights how good intentions do not always translate into practice, particularly within systems where culturally responsive approaches are not fully supported. Within this study, cultural paralysis is used to help explain the gap between kaiako intentions and enacted practice.

## ***2.2 Theoretical Foundations to Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies are underpinned by theoretical frameworks that recognise learning as relational, cultural, and shaped by identity. While culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on recognising and responding to learners' cultural identities, culturally sustaining pedagogy extends this by emphasising the ongoing maintenance and revitalisation of those identities over time. Within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, these understandings are closely connected to Māori worldviews and the ongoing commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. In response to the purpose of this study, the theoretical framing is intentionally narrowed to foreground approaches that centre Māori knowledge, identity, and language within English-medium schooling. As such, this study is primarily informed by Kaupapa Māori theory, with culturally sustaining pedagogy providing a key supporting framework. These frameworks are prioritised as they most strongly align with the aim of supporting Māori success as Māori.

Kaupapa Māori theory provides the central theoretical foundation for this research. Grounded in tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori, and collective wellbeing, Kaupapa Māori theory affirms the validity and legitimacy of Māori knowledge systems, while actively challenging deficit-based constructions of Māori learners within mainstream education (Smith, 1997; Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2010). Rather than positioning Māori perspectives as supplementary to dominant Western frameworks, Kaupapa Māori theory places Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing at the centre of educational practice. In doing so, it aligns with

the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supports tino rangatiratanga within schooling contexts (Orange, 2011). Through this lens, teaching is understood as a cultural and political act that carries responsibility for upholding the mana, identity, and aspirations of Māori learners. As argued by Durie (1998), when Māori perspectives are meaningfully embedded within education, learners are more likely to experience holistic success across academic, cultural, social, and emotional domains. Kaupapa Māori theory therefore reframes culturally responsive practice as a commitment to equity, identity affirmation, and Māori success as Māori.

Complementing this, culturally sustaining pedagogy extends beyond responsiveness to emphasise the active maintenance and revitalisation of cultural and linguistic identities within schooling contexts. Paris (2012) and Alim (2017) argue that education systems must move beyond simply acknowledging diversity, toward sustaining the cultural practices, languages, and identities of learners within everyday teaching and learning. In the Aotearoa context, this includes the intentional integration and normalisation of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori within classroom practice. Culturally sustaining pedagogy aligns closely with Kaupapa Māori theory in its emphasis on cultural continuity, identity, and resistance to assimilation. When used together, these frameworks strengthen the understanding that culturally responsive teaching is not only about inclusion, but about ensuring that Māori culture and language are actively upheld and valued within mainstream schooling environments. While this study is primarily grounded in Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy, additional theoretical perspectives are acknowledged as informing the wider field of culturally responsive education. Sociocultural theory, associated with Vygotsky (1978), emphasises that learning is socially constructed through interaction, relationships, and cultural context.

This perspective reinforces the importance of whanaungatanga and the role of cultural experiences in shaping how ākonga make meaning. Similarly, critical pedagogy, influenced by Freire (1970), highlights the need to examine power structures within education and to challenge inequities that impact learner outcomes. These perspectives provide useful background insights; however, they are not explored in depth, as they sit outside the central Indigenous and culturally sustaining focus of this study. Together, Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy provide a coherent and contextually grounded framework for this research. They foreground the importance of identity, language, and relationships in

teaching and learning, while also recognising the historical and structural conditions that continue to shape Māori learner experiences within mainstream education. Through this combined theoretical lens, culturally responsive practice is understood not only as effective pedagogy, but as an ongoing commitment to honouring Māori identity, sustaining culture, and supporting equitable outcomes for Māori learners.

### ***2.3 Key Principles of Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Culturally responsive teaching is often described through a set of key principles that guide how kaiako build relationships, design learning, and engage with ākongā. Within this study, these principles are understood through the combined lenses of Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy, which position identity, language, and culture as central to teaching and learning. Rather than being treated as generic teaching strategies, these principles are reframed as mana-enhancing practices that support Māori success as Māori within English-medium schooling.

This kaupapa is concerned with improving the outcomes for Māori learners, while recognising that culturally sustaining approaches benefit all ākongā. As such, the principles explored in this section are selected for their relevance to the Aotearoa context and their alignment with research that foregrounds Māori identity, relationships, and culturally grounded practice. Key principles identified within the literature include *cultural competence*, *high expectations*, *cultural relevance*, *collaboration*, and *reflective practice* (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Within Aotearoa, these principles are reinforced through initiatives such as Te Kotahitanga and He Kākano, which highlight relational pedagogy, high expectations, and culturally responsive leadership as central to Māori learner success (Bishop et al., 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Ministry of Education, 2011). When grounded in Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally sustaining pedagogy, these principles move beyond surface-level inclusion to support deeper shifts in teacher beliefs, relationships, and practice.

#### ***2.3.1 Cultural Competence***

Within a Kaupapa Māori framework, cultural competence extends beyond awareness to include an ongoing commitment to understanding one's own cultural positioning and its impact on practice. Kaiako are required to engage in critical self-reflection regarding their beliefs, assumptions, and privileges, recognising how these shape relationships with ākongā

and whānau (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2003; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017). This process aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogy, which calls for educators to actively value and sustain the cultural identities of learners. Challenging deficit thinking is a central component of this work. Rather than positioning Māori learners through a deficit lens, kaiako are encouraged to adopt strength-based approaches grounded in manaakitanga, empathy, and high expectations (Nieto & Bode, 2008; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Understanding learners' cultural narratives is essential, as these narratives shape identity, engagement, and belonging within the classroom (Banks, 2001). When kaiako intentionally honour these narratives, they create learning environments where ākongā feel validated, culturally safe, and empowered. In this way, cultural competence becomes a relational and ethical practice that supports Māori success as Māori.

### ***2.3.2 High Expectations***

High expectations are a core principle culturally sustaining practice and are closely linked to the concept of mana motuhake. Within this study, high expectations are understood not as rigid academic demands, but as a belief in the inherent potential of all learners, particularly Māori learners who have historically been positioned through deficit narratives. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally responsive teachers combine high expectations with relational and cultural support, enabling learners to thrive. In the Aotearoa context, Bishop and Berryman (2009) emphasise that rejecting deficit theorising is fundamental to raising achievement for Māori learners. Similarly, Bishop (2019) highlights the importance of relational pedagogy, where kaiako actively support, guide, and walk alongside learners. Practices such as co-constructing learning goals, scaffolding learning, and celebrating diverse forms of achievement reflect culturally sustaining approaches that affirm identity and capability (Bishop et al., 2003; Macfarlane et al., 2007; Nieto, 2010). Through this lens, high expectations are not only about achievement, but about affirming the mana, identity, and potential of Māori learners.

### ***2.3.3 Cultural Relevance***

Cultural relevance is central to both Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally responsive teaching, as it emphasises the importance of connecting learning to the identities, languages, values, and lived experiences of ākongā. Within the Aotearoa context, this includes the

authentic and sustained integration of te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and mātauranga Māori within everyday classroom practice. Practices such as storytelling, waiata, collaborative learning, and whanaungatanga-based approaches align with Māori pedagogies and support deeper engagement (Macfarlane, 2004). Henare (2001) highlights the concept of mauri, emphasising that when learning is culturally connected, it carries life force and meaning. From a culturally sustaining perspective, cultural relevance is not a one-off inclusion, but an ongoing commitment to maintaining and normalising Māori identity, language, and knowledge within the classroom.

#### ***2.3.4 Community Collaboration***

Bishop and Glynn (1999) emphasise that whānau are not passive participants, but active partners in the educational process. Collaboration with whānau, iwi, and community is a fundamental principle of culturally sustaining practice and is deeply embedded within Kaupapa Māori theory. Education is understood as a collective responsibility, where learning is strengthened through relationships and shared knowledge. Strong partnerships between schools and communities contribute to culturally grounded learning environments and improved outcomes for Māori learners (Bishop et al., 2003). Epstein (2011) further highlights that meaningful whānau engagement builds trust and strengthens learner success. Within a culturally sustaining framework, collaboration involves ongoing dialogue, shared decision-making, and recognition of the knowledge that exists within communities. This relational approach reflects the principles of whanaungatanga and manaakitanga, ensuring that education is responsive, inclusive, and grounded in the lived realities of learners and their whānau.

#### ***2.3.5 Reflective Practice***

Reflective practice is essential to culturally sustaining teaching, as it requires kaiako to critically examine both their practice and their cultural positioning. Schön (1983) and Gay (2010) describe reflection as an ongoing process of adapting teaching in response to learners' needs. However, within culturally responsive and sustaining frameworks, reflection must move beyond technical adjustments to include critical interrogation of beliefs, assumptions, and power dynamics (Howard, 2003; Sleeter, 2012). In the Aotearoa context, this includes reflecting on one's responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and how these shape

relationships with Māori learners (Berryman et al., 2018; Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2017). Engaging in kōrero with ākonga, whānau, and colleagues provides opportunities for kaiako to view their practice through multiple perspectives and deepen their understanding (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). While this process can be challenging, it is essential for disrupting deficit thinking and supporting transformation. Reflective practice, therefore, becomes a commitment to ongoing learning, humility, and responsiveness, enabling kaiako to enact culturally sustaining practices that affirm identity and promote equitable outcomes.

#### ***2.4 Challenges in Implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Despite the increasing emphasis on culturally responsive teaching, the implementation of culturally responsive teaching within mainstream schools continues to be complex and uneven. From a kaupapa Māori perspective, these challenges are not simply the result of individual kaiako capability, but are shaped by broader structural and institutional conditions that continue to privilege Eurocentric norms within education. These norms influence curriculum, assessment, and expectations in ways that position Māori knowledge, language, and identity as supplementary rather than central (May & Sleeter, 2010). These conditions are particularly significant for Māori learners, whose educational experiences continue to be shaped by these systemic inequities. Kaiako often express a commitment to strengthening their culturally responsive practice; however, many report feeling underprepared due to limited engagement with te ao Māori, te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and Kaupapa Māori theory within initial teacher education and professional learning (Berryman, 2014; Santoro, 2009). This lack of confidence can lead to hesitation or avoidance, particularly when kaiako fear “getting it wrong.” This is often described as *cultural paralysis*, where uncertainty and concern about cultural appropriateness inhibit meaningful engagement with culturally sustaining practices (Bishop, 2012). These challenges are further compounded by systemic pressures, including heavy workloads, shifting curriculum demands, and limited leadership support, which constrain the time and capacity required for relational pedagogy and critical reflection (Howard, 2003; Sleeter, 2012; Bishop & Berryman, 2006).

The persistence of deficit thinking and institutional racism also continues to shape schooling experiences for Māori learners. Deficit perspectives position learners as lacking, rather than critiquing the systems that marginalise Māori ways of knowing and being (Sleeter,

2011; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Addressing these challenges requires a shift toward strength-based, mana-enhancing approaches that affirm identity, language, and culture. However, this work involves significant emotional labour, as kaiako engage in ongoing self-reflection and confront their own assumptions and biases. Ultimately, culturally sustaining practice cannot rely solely on individual goodwill; it requires collective responsibility, strong leadership, and systemic commitment to supporting Māori success as Māori (Berryman et al., 2018; Bishop, 2019).

#### ***2.4.1 Te Kotahitanga: A Model for Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Te Kotahitanga, developed by Russell Bishop and colleagues, is widely recognised as a seminal initiative within the Aotearoa New Zealand context for advancing culturally responsive and relational pedagogy in mainstream schooling. Designed to address persistent inequities for Māori learners in English-medium secondary schools, the project aligns closely with Kaupapa Māori theory through its emphasis on affirming Māori identity, strengthening relationships, and rejecting deficit theorising (Bishop et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2007). From a culturally sustaining perspective, Te Kotahitanga moves beyond inclusion to actively centre Māori learners' cultural identities and experiences within teaching and learning, supporting Māori success as Māori.

Central to the initiative is the Effective Teaching Profile (ETP), which articulates a set of mana-enhancing practices including ako-based learning, high expectations, and culturally grounded relational pedagogy. These practices provided kaiako with a framework for shifting both beliefs and practice, enabling the creation of learning environments where Māori learners feel valued, connected, and supported. Evaluations of Te Kotahitanga demonstrated significant improvements in Māori students' engagement, attendance, and academic achievement (Bishop et al., 2007). More importantly, the initiative catalysed a critical shift in teacher mindset, as kaiako moved away from deficit explanations of underachievement and instead recognised the cultural strengths, knowledge, and potential that ākongā bring to the classroom.

Beyond individual classrooms, Te Kotahitanga also contributed to wider shifts in school culture, including strengthened whānau engagement, more collaborative teaching practices, and leadership approaches that more intentionally prioritised Māori success. In this

way, Te Kotahitanga illustrates that culturally sustaining practice is not simply a set of strategies, but a relational and systemic shift grounded in equity, identity affirmation, and collective responsibility. Its enduring significance within the Aotearoa evidence base highlights the importance of culturally grounded, research-informed approaches to transforming mainstream education for Māori learners.

#### ***2.4.2 He Kākano: Culturally Responsive Leadership in Practice***

He Kākano is a significant Aotearoa-based initiative that complements the work of Te Kotahitanga by focusing on the role of leadership in enabling culturally responsive and sustaining practice within schools. Developed by the Ministry of Education, He Kākano was designed to support school leaders to create conditions that promote Māori success as Māori through culturally responsive leadership, relational trust, and system-wide change (Ministry of Education, 2011). Grounded in principles aligned with Kaupapa Māori theory, the initiative emphasises the importance of identity, language, and culture as central to schooling, while also recognising the responsibilities of leadership under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. A key contribution of He Kākano is its focus on shifting leadership practices to support culturally sustaining environments, rather than relying solely on individual kaiako. The programme highlights how effective leadership can influence school culture, professional learning, and teacher practice by embedding tikanga, strengthening relationships with whānau and iwi, and prioritising equity-focused decision making. This aligns closely with culturally sustaining pedagogy, as it recognises that sustaining Māori identity and success requires not only classroom-level change, but also systemic and organisational commitment.

He Kākano demonstrates that leadership plays a critical role in either enabling or constraining culturally sustaining practice. Where leaders actively model culturally responsive values and invest in sustained professional learning, schools are more likely to develop coherent, culturally grounded approaches to teaching and learning. In contrast, where leadership is limited or compliance-driven, efforts often remain fragmented and inconsistent. As such, He Kākano reinforces the importance of collective responsibility and system-level transformation in supporting Māori learners. Together with Te Kotahitanga, it provides a strong Aotearoa evidence base that illustrates how culturally sustaining practice can be enacted across both classroom and leadership contexts.

## *2.5 Ongoing Barriers and Considerations*

Culture plays a central role in shaping how learners think, feel, and make meaning in the world. However, within mainstream schooling in Aotearoa, dominant educational structures continue to privilege Western worldviews, often positioning Māori knowledge, language, and identity as peripheral rather than central (Berryman, 2014; Macfarlane, 2004). From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, this creates conditions where Māori learners may experience whakamā, disconnection, and a diminished sense of belonging when their identities are not reflected within teaching and learning contexts. When culturally sustaining practices are not embedded in everyday classroom environments, opportunities for engagement, confidence, and identity affirmation are significantly reduced. These impacts extend beyond emotional responses, shaping how learners see themselves within education and influencing their participation and achievement.

The persistence of these conditions reflects broader systemic challenges. When a dominant cultural lens continues to define what counts as knowledge and success, Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing remain marginalised. Addressing this requires more than individual teacher effort; it demands systemic and relational change. Research highlights that kaiako alone cannot disrupt entrenched patterns of inequity without sustained support from leadership, whānau, iwi, and wider educational systems (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Berryman et al., 2018). This includes meaningful professional learning in te ao Māori, strengthened partnerships with communities, and school-wide commitments to embedding tikanga and mātauranga Māori within everyday practice (Macfarlane, 2004; Ministry of Education, 2013). From a culturally sustaining perspective, progress requires moving beyond symbolic inclusion toward long-term, intentional transformation. This involves creating learning environments where Māori identity, language, and culture are not treated as add-ons, but are normalised and valued as central to teaching and learning. Such an approach aligns with the aims of this study, which seeks to understand how kaiako can enact practices that support Māori success as Māori within English-medium schooling. Ultimately, bridging this cultural gap requires collective responsibility, sustained commitment, and a willingness to challenge and transform the structures that continue to shape inequitable outcomes (Bishop, 2019; Savage et al., 2011).

### ***2.5.1 Deficiencies in Institutional Support***

The implementation of culturally responsive teaching remains uneven across schools in Aotearoa, reflecting on broader systemic and institutional challenges. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, these challenges are not simply issues of individual teacher capability, but are shaped by structural conditions that influence how education is organised and prioritised. One contributing factor is the ongoing pace of curriculum and policy change, which places significant pressure on kaiako and school leaders. When teachers are burdened by shifting expectations, assessment demands, and administrative responsibilities, culturally sustaining practice is often overshadowed by compliance-driven tasks (Sleeter, 2012; Timperley, 2011). In the absence of clear, coherent direction, kaiako may lack the time, confidence, and support required to meaningfully embed te ao Māori within everyday teaching practice, resulting in inconsistency and uncertainty (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Macfarlane, 2004).

Leadership plays a critical role in either enabling or constraining culturally sustaining practice. Research from Te Kotahitanga demonstrates that when school leaders actively prioritise Māori success as Māori, foster relational pedagogy, and cultivate culturally capable school environments, improved outcomes for Māori learners are more likely to occur (Bishop et al., 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). In contrast, where leadership is hesitant, compliance-driven, or lacks sustained commitment, culturally responsive efforts often remain fragmented or tokenistic (Savage et al., 2011). This reinforces the understanding that culturally sustaining practice cannot rely solely on individual goodwill, but requires collective and system-wide commitment. Addressing these deficiencies requires structural transformation, including sustained professional learning, stable policy direction, and leadership that actively upholds Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. Without this support, the responsibility for change falls disproportionately on kaiako, many of whom are already navigating significant workload and emotional demands. From a culturally sustaining perspective, meaningful progress depends on institutions moving beyond symbolic commitments toward deliberate, sustained action that embeds Māori identity, language, and knowledge at the centre of schooling (Ministry of Education, 2013; Berryman et al., 2018; Bishop, 2019).

### ***2.5.2 Language and Communication Challenges***

Language is a central component of culture and plays a critical role in shaping relationships, identity, and learning within the classroom. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, te reo Māori is not simply a tool for communication, but a taonga that carries cultural knowledge, identity, and ways of being. However, within English-medium schooling, many kaiako report limited confidence in using te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, which can constrain their ability to build culturally grounded relationships and learning environments. This lack of confidence may result in hesitation or avoidance, reinforcing dominant English-language norms and limiting opportunities for Māori learners to see their language and identity reflected in everyday practice. Research highlights that when te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are meaningfully integrated into teaching and learning, they contribute to stronger relationships, increased learner confidence, and a greater sense of belonging (Macfarlane et al., 2007). However, without sustained support, these practices risk remaining superficial or symbolic rather than embedded and normalised. From a culturally sustaining perspective, the inclusion of language must move beyond token gestures toward the active maintenance and revitalisation of te reo Māori within classroom contexts. This requires ongoing professional learning, access to resources, and supportive school environments that enable kaiako to develop both confidence and capability.

Language considerations also extend beyond te reo Māori to include the diverse linguistic backgrounds of learners within Aotearoa classrooms. When home languages are not acknowledged or valued, learners may feel unseen or pressured to assimilate into dominant cultural norms. Strengthening linguistic awareness and responsiveness is therefore essential for creating culturally safe and inclusive learning environments. Ultimately, addressing language and communication challenges requires a commitment to normalising te reo Māori and valuing linguistic diversity as integral to culturally sustaining practice, supporting Māori learners to engage as themselves and succeed as Māori.

### ***2.5.3 Gaps in Teacher Training and Professional Development***

Culturally responsive teaching requires both relational commitment and specialised knowledge; however, many initial teacher education programmes do not provide the depth needed to prepare kaiako for bicultural and culturally diverse classrooms. From a Kaupapa

Māori perspective, this reflects a broader gap in how teacher education engages with Māori epistemologies, Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, and the structural conditions that shape inequitable outcomes. While many kaiako demonstrate care and commitment toward their learners, care alone does not equip them with the knowledge required to enact culturally sustaining practice. Research by Berryman et al. (2017) highlights that Māori students often encounter teachers with limited understanding of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, resulting in practice that remains surface-level rather than culturally grounded.

Addressing these gaps requires a systemic commitment to embedding bicultural learning across both initial teacher education and ongoing professional development. When kaiako are supported to engage meaningfully with te reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and Kaupapa Māori frameworks, they are better positioned to create learning environments where Māori learners feel valued, culturally affirmed, and able to succeed as Māori. Without this level of sustained investment, culturally sustaining practice risks remaining aspirational rather than embedded within everyday schooling contexts.

#### ***2.5.4 Additional Barriers (Workload, Emotional Labour, and Bias)***

Culturally responsive pedagogy involves a significant amount of cognitive and emotional labour as kaiako are constantly required to engage in ongoing self-reflection, unlearning and critical examination of their own beliefs and biases. From a kaupapa Māori perspective, this work is essential for disrupting deficit thinking and addressing the inequities that shape Māori learner experiences. However, such reflections require vulnerability, time, and supportive professional environments. While critical reflection is widely recognised as essential for transforming practice, it can also be emotionally demanding, particularly in contexts where collective support is limited (Howard, 2003; Sleeter, 2012). Bishop and Berryman (2006) further highlight that shifting from deficit to agentic thinking is not only challenging, but often resisted within systems that continue to normalise Eurocentric expectations.

Workload pressures and systemic demands further constrain the ability of kaiako to engage in culturally sustaining practice. Ongoing curriculum changes, assessment requirements, and administrative responsibilities reduce the time and capacity needed for relational pedagogy and sustained reflective practice. In the absence of strong leadership and

a school-wide commitment to equity, the responsibility for enacting change often falls on individual kaiako, who must navigate both the emotional and practical demands of this work. From a culturally sustaining perspective, this highlights the need for collective responsibility and systemic support, ensuring that culturally grounded practice is not an added burden, but an embedded and supported aspect of teaching.

## ***2.6 Summary***

This literature review has explored the theoretical, pedagogical and contextual foundations that shape culturally responsive and sustaining practice within English-medium schooling in Aotearoa. Grounded in Kaupapa Māori theory and supported by culturally sustaining pedagogy, the review has emphasised the importance of positioning Māori identity, language, and culture as central to teaching and learning. These frameworks provide a critical lens through which culturally responsive practice can be understood, not as a set of strategies, but as an ongoing, relational commitment to equity, relationality, and Māori success as Māori.

The review has highlighted key principles that underpin effective practice, including cultural competence, high expectations, cultural relevance, collaboration, and reflective practice. When enacted through a Kaupapa Māori and culturally sustaining lens, these principles move beyond surface-level inclusion to support deeper shifts in teacher beliefs, relationships, and classroom practice. In particular, Aotearoa-based initiatives such as Te Kotahitanga and He Kākano demonstrate how culturally grounded, research-informed approaches can transform both teaching practice and school-wide conditions, reinforcing the importance of relational pedagogy, leadership, and collective responsibility.

At the same time, the literature has identified significant and ongoing barriers that continue to constrain the enactment of culturally responsive practice. These include institutional constraints, limited confidence in te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, gaps in teacher training and professional learning, and the emotional labour required to challenge deficit thinking and enact meaningful change. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, these challenges are not simply individual, but are embedded within wider structural and systemic conditions that continue to shape inequitable outcomes for Māori learners. Taken together, this body of literature highlights both the potential and the complexity of culturally sustaining practice within mainstream education. While there is strong agreement in the literature that culturally

responsive and sustaining practice is relational and grounded in identity, there remains limited understanding of how these principles are interpreted and enacted by kaiako within everyday mainstream classroom contexts. This gap informs the focus of the present study, which seeks to explore how kaiako understand and apply culturally sustaining practices grounded in te ao Māori. In doing so, this research aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to support Māori learners to succeed as Māori within Aotearoa's education system.

## **CHAPTER 3: TIKANGA RANGAHAU – METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological foundations of this kaupapa, detailing the research paradigm, design, participant engagement, data collection methods, analytical procedures, researcher positionality, and ethical considerations that guided the study. It explains how the research was conceptualised, conducted, and interpreted, while ensuring that the process upheld the mana of all involved.

In a Kaupapa Māori context, methodology extends beyond technical procedure and is understood as a relational and ethical commitment. Kaupapa Māori scholars emphasise that research must be grounded in relationships, reciprocity, cultural safety, and collective responsibility, ensuring that the mana of participants and their communities is upheld throughout the research process (Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2010; Cram, 2009). Methodology therefore shapes not only what is studied, but how, why, and with whom knowledge is created. This research seeks to understand how primary school kaiako in Aotearoa interpret and enact culturally responsive practice. The methodological approach was deliberately selected to align with this focus, enabling in-depth exploration of kaiako perspectives and experiences. The chosen methods support the research questions by privileging participant voice, relational engagement, and culturally grounded ways of knowing.

This study is anchored in a Kaupapa Māori paradigm, shaped by te ao Māori worldviews and guided by principles of aroha, manaakitanga, and relational accountability. As a Māori researcher with lived experience as a kaiako, I approached participants not as “subjects” but as whanaunga - colleagues who generously shared their experiences, challenges, and insights. This relational positioning shaped both the research process and the interpretation of findings. This chapter demonstrates how the methodology upheld tikanga Māori, protected participant mana, and supported a research environment grounded in trust, reciprocity, and cultural integrity.

## **3.2 Research Paradigm and Theoretical Framework**

### ***3.2.1 Kaupapa Māori Paradigm***

This kaupapa is situated within a Kaupapa Māori paradigm, a philosophical, political, and methodological framework that centres Māori knowledge, aspirations, and ways of being (Smith, 1997; Smith, 2012). Kaupapa Māori emerged in response to a long history of extractive, colonial research that marginalised Māori voices, misrepresented Māori realities, and contributed to ongoing inequities in education (Pihama, 2010). In contrast, Kaupapa Māori reclaims research as a tool for empowerment, transformation, and the pursuit of mana motuhake. It asserts that research involving Māori must be grounded in Māori values, shaped by Māori perspectives, and accountable to Māori communities.

At the centre of this paradigm is te ao Māori, a worldview in which knowledge (mātauranga) is understood as relational, contextual, and interconnected with whenua, whānau, atua, and whakapapa (Pihama et al., 2015). This relational understanding directly informed the design of this study, shaping how participants were engaged, how kōrero was gathered, and how meaning was constructed. Rather than positioning knowledge as something extracted from participants, this research approached knowledge as something shared, co-constructed, and held with collective responsibility. Kaupapa Māori is guided by values such as whanaungatanga (relationships), manaakitanga (care and support), aroha (compassion), mahaki (humility), pono (integrity), kaitiakitanga (guardianship), and mana (dignity) (Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2010; Berryman et al., 2013). These values were not abstract principles but actively shaped the research process. Whanaungatanga informed participant recruitment and engagement, ensuring relationships were prioritised before formal data collection. Manaakitanga guided the creation of safe and respectful spaces for sharing experiences. Pono and mahaki supported ongoing reflexivity and ethical decision-making throughout the research.

Importantly, this paradigm aligns with the focus of this study, which seeks to understand how primary school kaiako interpret and enact culturally responsive practice within English-medium settings. A Kaupapa Māori approach enables these experiences to be explored in ways that privilege kaiako voice, recognise the significance of context, and

honour the relational nature of teaching and learning. It ensures that the research methods used are culturally appropriate and responsive to the lived realities of participants.

Kaupapa Māori research also demands accountability — to participants, to whānau, to whakapapa, and to the wider Māori community. As Cram (2018) notes, research “by Māori, for Māori, with Māori” is an ongoing commitment rather than a fixed outcome. This study upholds that commitment by elevating kaiako voices, protecting their narratives, and framing findings in ways that contribute to Māori educational aspirations and collective wellbeing.

### ***3.2.2 Culturally Responsive Teaching, Critical Theory, and Transformative Pedagogy***

While Kaupapa Māori forms the foundation of this kaupapa, the study is further informed by culturally responsive pedagogy and critical education theory. These interconnected frameworks align with Kaupapa Māori in their shared commitment to challenging inequitable systems, prioritising relationships, and affirming the cultural identities and strengths that ākonga bring to learning (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Together, they provide a complementary lens through which culturally responsive practice can be understood and examined.

Culturally responsive pedagogy recognises that learners do not enter classrooms as blank slates, but bring with them reo, pūrākau, whānau histories, and culturally grounded ways of knowing. As Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2010) argue, effective teaching is grounded in recognising, valuing, and building upon these lived experiences. Within this study, this perspective informed the focus on kaiako voice, ensuring that their understandings and enactments of culturally responsive practice were explored in ways that honoured context, identity, and relational practice. This aligns closely with Kaupapa Māori principles, where tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake are upheld through shared power and meaningful relationships between kaiako and ākonga (Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2010).

Critical education theory, particularly drawing on the work of Freire (1970), further strengthens this framework by encouraging educators to examine the broader social, cultural, and political structures that shape educational experiences. In the Aotearoa context, this lens highlights how deficit thinking and colonial narratives have historically positioned Māori learners in ways that obscure systemic inequities (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Sleeter, 2012).

This perspective informed the analytical approach of this study, supporting critical engagement with kaiako narratives and enabling deeper exploration of how culturally responsive practice is shaped by both individual agency and structural conditions. Together, these theoretical perspectives reinforce that culturally responsive practice is not simply a set of strategies, but a relational, political, and ethical commitment. They guided the methodological choices in this study, including the use of qualitative methods that privilege participant voice, relational engagement, and critical reflection. Through this combined lens, the research seeks to understand how kaiako interpret and enact culturally responsive practice within their specific contexts, while also recognising the broader systems that influence their work.

### **3.3 Research design**

This taonga adopts a qualitative research design, selected to capture the depth and complexity of kaiako lived experiences within their everyday classroom contexts. Rather than seeking generalisations, this approach focuses on understanding experiences, narratives, and the meanings constructed through teaching practice. Qualitative approaches align with Kaupapa Māori values, as they enable relational, contextual, and narrative-rich inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

In alignment with Kaupapa Māori principles, this approach prioritises:

- relational engagement
- contextual understanding
- narrative richness
- the interconnectedness of researcher and participants
- the protection and elevation of participant voice

The kaupapa evolved iteratively, guided by tikanga Māori, ongoing reflexivity, kōrero with supervisors, and a sustained commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do primary school kaiako in Aotearoa understand culturally responsive practice?
2. How do kaiako enact culturally responsive practice within their classroom contexts?
3. What challenges and supports do kaiako experience when implementing culturally responsive pedagogy?

These questions shaped the overall research design and informed the selection of qualitative methods. A qualitative approach was chosen as it enables in-depth exploration of kaiako perspectives and lived experiences, aligning with the relational and interpretive nature of Kaupapa Māori research. This design ensured alignment between the research questions, the Kaupapa Māori paradigm, and the chosen methods, particularly the use of semi-structured interviews to explore kaiako experiences in depth.

### ***3.3.1 Participant Recruitment***

Participants were recruited purposively, aligning with the relational and intentional nature of Kaupapa Māori methodology. Purposive sampling is widely used in qualitative research to select individuals who hold rich, relevant insights into the phenomenon being explored (Patton, 2015). In this kaupapa, eight kaiako were invited to participate due to their experience teaching in mainstream primary school settings and their willingness to reflect deeply on culturally responsive practice.

The eight participants were all practising primary school kaiako working in English-medium mainstream schools across Aotearoa. Participants represented a range of teaching experience, from early-career teachers to those with several years in the profession, providing diverse perspectives on culturally responsive practice. While not all participants identified as Māori, all had experience working with Māori learners and were engaged, to varying degrees, in culturally responsive approaches within their classrooms. This diversity of identity and experience enabled a richer understanding of how culturally responsive pedagogy is interpreted and enacted across different contexts. Consistent with Kaupapa Māori research principles, recruitment occurred through relational channels. Initial contact was made through personalised email invitations that clearly outlined the kaupapa, expectations, and tikanga guiding the research (Smith, 2012; Cram, 2009). Follow-up contact was made *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* where possible, or via Zoom meetings. This approach ensured that participation was

grounded in whakawhanaungatanga and upheld the mana of each kaiako by allowing them to make informed, unpressured decisions.

Participants received detailed information about the interview process, including guiding questions, confidentiality procedures, and their rights regarding data use. Cultural safety remained central, with kaiako given full autonomy to determine how, where, and when the interview would occur, whether in their classroom, a neutral location, or via Zoom. They were reminded of their right to withdraw or clarify any aspect of their kōrero at any stage. Upholding aroha ki te tangata ensured the process remained transparent, respectful, and collaborative, reflecting Kaupapa Māori commitments to care, integrity, and relational accountability (Smith, 2012). Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria guided participant selection. To be included, participants were required to be current practising primary school teachers within English-medium mainstream schooling contexts in Aotearoa, with direct classroom responsibility for teaching ākonga. Participants also needed to demonstrate a willingness to reflect on and discuss their experiences of culturally responsive practice. Teachers working exclusively in secondary, early childhood, or kura kaupapa Māori settings were excluded, as the focus of this research was on culturally responsive teaching within mainstream primary schools. Educators not currently in teaching roles were also excluded. These criteria ensured that participant experiences aligned closely with the research aims and provided rich, relevant insights into the intended context.

### ***3.3.2 Data Collection***

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they align with Māori communicative practices of kanohi-ki-te-kanohi engagement, whakawhanaungatanga, and relational dialogue (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Unlike more structured interview formats, semi-structured interviews allow kōrero to unfold naturally, giving participants space to speak in their own way, at their own pace, and in their own reo. Kaupapa Māori scholars emphasise that research encounters must uphold mana, support participant autonomy, and allow stories to emerge organically rather than be constrained by rigid questioning (Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2010; Cram, 2009). In this way, the incorporation of tikanga transforms interviews from a technical data collection tool into shared relational spaces.

Consistent with this literature, this method respects kaiako autonomy by allowing participants to guide the direction of kōrero and share what they consider most meaningful within the interview space (Smith, 1999). The flexible structure supports narrative-based storytelling and reflects Māori oral traditions, enabling participants to express their experiences in ways that align with how knowledge is traditionally shared (Cram, 2009; Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Meaning is co-constructed through this process, with insights emerging collaboratively rather than being extracted by the researcher, consistent with Kaupapa Māori commitments to reciprocity and shared understanding (Pihama et al., 2002). In this way, the method upholds the relational ethos of Kaupapa Māori research by prioritising whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and mutual respect throughout the research encounter (Berryman et al., 2013). Interviews began with karakia to create spiritual grounding, set intention, and ensure cultural safety for both researcher and participant.

Time was intentionally taken for whakawhanaungatanga, connecting through personal stories, shared experiences, and whakapapa connections. Only after relational connection was established did formal questioning begin. Participants chose their own interview settings, whether their classrooms or via Zoom. Conversations flowed bilingually, depending on participants' comfort. When kupu Māori or concepts emerged, care was taken to honour their meaning and ensure they retained their cultural integrity. All interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed, and returned to participants for review. These interviews directly addressed the research questions by enabling kaiako to share how they understand culturally responsive practice, how they enact it within their classroom contexts, and the challenges and supports they experience in doing so.

### ***3.3.3 Interpretive Analysis***

Interpretive analysis was central to understanding the patterns and meanings within each kōrero. A combination of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and narrative analysis was used to identify recurring concepts, values, and experiences, reflecting both the content of participants' stories and the relational manner in which they were shared.

The process began with repeated readings of each transcript and multiple re-listens to the audio recordings to attend not only to the spoken words but also to tone, emotion, pauses, and wairua — elements of communication that carry significant meaning in Māori contexts

(Berryman et al., 2013; Smith, 2012). Coding proceeded inductively, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the kōrero rather than being imposed through predetermined categories. Both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying) meanings were analysed, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidance. Attention was given to how cultural concepts such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and mana motuhake were expressed and embodied within the narratives, aligning with Kaupapa Māori approaches to interpretation that privilege cultural context, relational meaning, and participant voice (Pihama, 2010; Cram, 2009).

As patterns became clearer, connections were drawn across kōrero to identify shared experiences, challenges, and values. Themes were refined through an iterative and reflexive process that included ongoing self-reflection, supervisor discussions, and cross-checking emerging interpretations against Kaupapa Māori theory and culturally responsive pedagogical frameworks. This cyclical approach reflects the relational accountability and critical reflexivity emphasised in Kaupapa Māori research (Smith, 2012; Berryman et al., 2013). In keeping with these principles, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcripts and clarify or expand their kōrero, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in their intentions and protected the integrity of their voices. This step strengthened the cultural safety and accuracy of interpretation, reinforcing that meaning-making within this kaupapa was collaborative rather than researcher-driven.

This analytical approach enabled the research questions to be explored in depth, revealing patterns in how kaiako understand culturally responsive practice, how they enact it within their classrooms, and the challenges and supports they experience in doing so.

#### ***3.3.4 Validation and Feedback***

In alignment with Kaupapa Māori principles of relational accountability, participants were given the opportunity to review, correct, or elaborate on their transcripts. This process ensured that their experiences were represented accurately and respectfully, while protecting the integrity of participant voice. Returning transcripts for review is widely recognised as a mana-enhancing practice within Māori research, as it enables participants to retain control over how their kōrero is interpreted and shared (Smith, 2012; Cram, 2009).

An example of relational flexibility occurred when one interview shifted into a relaxed kōrero between two kaiako friends, rather than remaining within a formal interview structure. Rather than interrupting this natural flow, the researcher allowed the conversation to unfold organically, recognising that this form of dialogue held deeper relational authenticity and cultural integrity. This approach aligns with Kaupapa Māori research literature, which emphasises the importance of privileging natural, relational modes of communication and allowing participants to guide the direction of kōrero (Smith, 2012; Pihama, 2010).

Māori scholars highlight that meaning often emerges through informal, relational interactions rather than structured questioning, and that kanohi-ki-te-kanohi kōrero is strengthened when participants feel comfortable, connected, and able to speak freely (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Cram, 2009). By honouring this authentic, participant-led form of kōrero, the research upheld key values of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and relational accountability that underpin Kaupapa Māori methodology. This process also reinforced the collaborative nature of the research relationship, positioning participants not as subjects of inquiry, but as partners whose insights contribute to the meaning-making process alongside the researcher. Participants' feedback strengthened the authenticity and credibility of the data, while demonstrating transparency and upholding the relationships central to this kaupapa.

This validation process further supported the research questions by ensuring that participants' perspectives on culturally responsive practice, including their understandings, enactments, and experiences of challenges and supports, were accurately represented.

### **3.4 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality**

As a Māori researcher and kaiako, it was important to critically examine the position I held throughout the research process. Rather than striving for neutrality, this research was guided by reflexivity and transparency. I acknowledged my own positioning, experiences, and values, and engaged in ongoing critical reflection to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' kōrero and aligned with the ethical principles of Kaupapa Māori research.

Reflexivity involved continuous engagement with questions such as: whose voices are being amplified, whose voices may be absent, and how my own assumptions and experiences

may influence interpretation (Berger, 2015). Within this kaupapa, Te Tiriti o Waitangi was not only a professional obligation but also a deeply personal commitment, providing an ethical foundation that guided decision-making throughout the research. This research is therefore understood as a taonga — not simply a piece of academic work, but a contribution toward transformation and equity for Māori learners.

Ensuring that all interactions upheld the mana of participants and their taura required a commitment to relational ethics grounded in aroha ki te tangata. This involved prioritising care, respect, and responsibility throughout the research process. Conducting interviews with kaiako across diverse mainstream contexts required humility, openness, and reciprocity. My positionality shaped the relational space, enabling insider understanding and cultural connection with participants who were also navigating culturally responsive practice within mainstream schooling contexts. At the same time, it required conscious effort to maintain analytical rigour and avoid imposing my own experiences onto participant narratives. The kōrero shared by participants often resonated with my own experiences of navigating mainstream education while upholding Māori values. This proximity made reflexivity essential, ensuring that participant voice remained central and was not overshadowed by my own perspectives. Engagement was guided by the principle of ako, recognising that knowledge is co-constructed and that learning occurs through reciprocal relationships. While this shared positioning supported relational depth, it is also acknowledged that participants held diverse identities, experiences, and levels of engagement with te ao Māori, meaning their perspectives were not identical to my own. Recognising this difference was critical to ensuring that their kōrero was not interpreted solely through my own lens. To manage this, I engaged in ongoing reflexive practice throughout the research process, critically examining how my assumptions and experiences may have shaped interpretation. This included revisiting transcripts, seeking clarification from participants where needed, and ensuring that analysis remained grounded in participant voice rather than researcher interpretation.

To support this process, I engaged in reflective journaling, ongoing dialogue with supervisors, and continued engagement with Kaupapa Māori scholarship. These practices strengthened the credibility and integrity of the research by ensuring that interpretations remained grounded, ethical, and accountable. As Smith (2012) asserts, Kaupapa Māori research is inherently relational and collective, undertaken with communities and for them,

rather than on them. Ultimately, this positionality carries a responsibility to honour the mana of participants and to ensure that their voices contribute to meaningful change within mainstream schooling, so that Māori educational aspirations are upheld.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were central to this kaupapa and guided all stages of the research process. Ethics were guided by both the Massey University Human Ethics Committee guidelines and Kaupapa Māori ethical frameworks. Ethical approval was granted by Massey University's Human Ethics Committee (Ethics number: 4000029957).

However, ethical practice extended beyond institutional compliance and was enacted through tikanga Māori, including respect, care, and relational accountability. This approach ensured that the research upheld the mana of participants and aligned with the values underpinning Kaupapa Māori methodology. The following subsections outline how these ethical commitments were enacted through processes of informed consent, confidentiality, data security, and cultural and relational ethics.

#### ***3.5.1 Informed Consent***

Each participant was provided with clear and detailed information prior to the interview process (see Appendix A). Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions before, during, and after the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained before any data collection began. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research and to clarify or amend their kōrero if needed. These practices upheld the principle of aroha ki te tangata by ensuring that participation remained comfortable, respectful, and participant-led.

#### ***3.5.2 Confidentiality and Data Security***

Pseudonyms (Kaiako 1–8) were used to protect participant anonymity. All raw data were securely stored on password-protected devices, and identifying details were removed from transcripts and subsequent analysis. These practices upheld manaakitanga by safeguarding participants' dignity, wellbeing, and trust, while also recognising their responsibilities within their wider school and community contexts.

### ***3.5.3 Cultural and Relational Ethics***

This kaupapa was guided by the Te Ara Tika Guidelines (Hudson et al., 2010), underpinned by the principles of whakapapa, tika, manaakitanga, and mana. These principles ensured that relationships remained central to ethical practice throughout the research process. Care was taken to avoid harm, misrepresentation, or misinterpretation of participant kōrero. Transcripts were shared with participants following completion to ensure their voices were represented accurately and respectfully. Any critique presented in this research was directed toward systemic structures rather than individuals, thereby maintaining participant mana while still highlighting the need for change within mainstream education.

### **3.6 Summary**

This methodology is grounded in Kaupapa Māori frameworks and guided by culturally responsive teaching whakaaro, underpinned by relational ethics. It prioritises the voices, values, aspirations, and lived experiences of Māori, while maintaining academic rigour. Through a qualitative approach, incorporating kanohi-ki-te-kanohi kōrero and reflective practice, this kaupapa has sought to explore how kaiako in mainstream primary school settings navigate the ongoing enactment of culturally responsive teaching. The methodological approach ensured alignment between the research questions, methods, and analysis, while upholding the principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and relational accountability. Given the relational and context-dependent nature of culturally responsive practice identified in the literature, a qualitative Kaupapa Māori approach was necessary to meaningfully capture kaiako experiences and interpretations.

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated how the research was conducted in a way that honoured participant voice, upheld tikanga Māori, and contributed to a deeper understanding of culturally responsive practice within the Aotearoa education context

## **CHAPTER 4: NGĀ KITENGA: FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the collective voices of eight mainstream kaiako who participated in this kaupapa. Their kōrero offer insight into how culturally responsive practice is understood, experienced, and enacted within English-medium classrooms in Aotearoa. These findings are presented in direct response to the research questions guiding this study, which explore how kaiako conceptualise culturally responsive teaching and how this is reflected within their everyday practice.

Data was gathered through semi-structured, kanohi-ki-te-kanohi interviews, where participants were invited to share their experiences, challenges, and understandings of culturally responsive pedagogy. Questions focused on how kaiako define culturally responsive practice, how they incorporate te ao Māori within their teaching, and what supports or barriers influence their ability to enact this approach.

A thematic analysis, guided by Kaupapa Māori methodology, was used to interpret the data. This involved an iterative process of familiarisation with the data, initial coding of participant responses, and the grouping of codes into broader patterns of meaning. These patterns were then refined into five key themes that reflect shared experiences across participants. Throughout this process, attention was given to ensuring that the integrity of participants' voices remained central, and that interpretations were grounded in relational and culturally responsive ways of knowing.

Each theme is grounded in Māori values and supported by direct quotes from participants, identified using the pseudonyms Kaiako 1–8. Where relevant, participant context (such as teaching experience and setting) is included to strengthen the depth and meaning of the findings. Together, these themes tell a collective story of relationships, language, identity, barriers, and growth, woven through a shared commitment to honouring Māori learners and upholding their mana within everyday teaching practice.

**Table 4.1.1- Themes and subthemes**

Theme	Subthemes
Whanaungatanga (Relationships and Connection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher–whānau engagement and building trust through everyday interactions</li> <li>• Whanau as partners</li> <li>• Belonging and Collective Responsibility</li> </ul>
Normalising Te Reo Māori and Tikanga in Daily Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embedding tikanga through Routine</li> <li>• Te Reo as an everyday language</li> <li>• Celebrating cultural events</li> <li>• Te Tiriti and Curricular Commitment</li> </ul>
Student Agency and Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally grounded in confidence</li> <li>• Student leadership in haka, waiata</li> <li>• Valuing multiple cultural identities</li> </ul>
Systemic and Structural Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and Resourcing</li> <li>• Tokenism</li> <li>• Curriculum Constraints and Time</li> <li>• Lack of whānau engagement</li> </ul>
Professional Growth and Reflexivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning through Professional Development</li> <li>• Learning through Whanaungatanga</li> <li>• Reflective practice</li> </ul>

## **4.2 Theme 1: Whanaungatanga (Relationships and Connections)**

This theme responds directly to the research questions, particularly in understanding how kaiako conceptualise culturally responsive practice and how this is enacted within their everyday teaching. Across all eight participants, whanaungatanga emerged as a central and foundational element of culturally responsive pedagogy. This consistency across participants indicates a shared understanding that relationships are not an additional component of teaching, but rather the core through which all teaching and learning occurs.

Participants, who ranged from beginning to experienced kaiako working in English-medium primary settings, consistently described the importance of building genuine, trusting, and respectful relationships with both learners and their whānau. These relationships were not framed as professional strategies, but as expressions of manaakitanga and aroha-ki-te-tangata, reflecting a deep responsibility to uphold and uplift the mana of their learners.

*“It means knowing your learner, because if someone is this race, it doesn’t mean they are that culture ... It’s knowing what’s important to them, how they perceive the world, and bringing that together.” (Kaiako 2)*

From an analytical perspective, this theme was developed through repeated references across participant kōrero to relational practices, care, trust, and connection. Initial codes such as *knowing the learner*, *building trust*, and *caring relationships* were grouped to form the broader concept of whanaungatanga. These patterns highlight that culturally responsive teaching is experienced as relational rather than transactional.

In this context, whanaungatanga extends beyond the classroom, reaching into homes, communities, and other spaces where learning occurs. For participants, it was described as the foundation for effective teaching and transformative practice.

### ***4.2.1 Sub-Theme 1: Teacher–Whānau Engagement and Everyday Trust***

This sub-theme reflects how kaiako enact culturally responsive practice through ongoing engagement with whānau, aligning with the research focus on how practice is lived in everyday contexts. Participants described that authentic relationships with whānau are

foundational to their teaching, enabling trust, open communication, and shared responsibility for learner wellbeing.

Kaiako across different levels of experience highlighted that these relationships are built over time and require intentional effort, particularly when navigating challenging conversations.

*“We had a really good kōrero, and I had a kōrero with her whānau about it ... she’s doing kapa haka this year.” (Kaiako 7)*

*“Although it’s not part of the question but it would be whānau first, because I’m quite often having to have difficult conversations and the better connected we are, the more they feel safe.” (Kaiako 1)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes related to communication, trust-building, and ongoing engagement. These patterns suggest that culturally responsive practice is sustained through relational consistency rather than one-off interactions.

#### **4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2: Whānau as Partners in Learning**

This sub-theme further develops the findings by illustrating how kaiako move beyond engagement to establish genuine partnerships with whānau. This directly addresses the research question focused on how culturally responsive pedagogy is enacted in practice.

Participants described shifting from traditional models of schooling, where whānau are positioned as external, toward relational approaches that recognise whānau as co-educators and holders of valuable knowledge.

*“When I’m trying to establish a relationship with a Māori whānau ... I just try and make it quite casual and like I’m just getting to know them as people first before going straight into ‘what do you want your kids to learn?’” (Kaiako 5)*

Kaiako, particularly those working in community-oriented school contexts, emphasised the importance of humility, warmth, and openness. Practices such as greeting

whānau at the gate and engaging in informal kōrero were described as everyday enactments of manaakitanga.

*“I have good relationships with whānau like that ... I always go out there and meet them. And I’m not afraid to hongi them, or give them a hug ... it’s just what you do. That’s probably one of my strengths.” (Kaiako 3)*

From an analytical perspective, this sub-theme was constructed through codes such as *partnership, shared knowledge, and collaboration*. These codes highlight a shift from transactional engagement toward relational, culturally grounded partnerships.

*“Using the meaningful experiences that they can draw on, and practising tuakana–teina, and involving the whānau with their learning.” (Kaiako 6)*

Participants consistently acknowledged the expertise of whānau and described how these partnerships strengthened trust, communication, and learner engagement. This suggests that culturally responsive practice is enhanced when learning is co-constructed between home and school.

#### **4.2.3 Sub-Theme 3: *Belonging and Collective Responsibility***

This sub-theme illustrates how whanaungatanga operates not only at an individual level but also as a collective and structural practice within classroom and school environments. This aligns with the research focus on how culturally responsive practice is embedded within wider teaching contexts.

Participants described intentionally fostering a sense of belonging through values grounded in te ao Māori, which shaped both classroom culture and school-wide practices.

*“All of our school values are based on Māori values—whanaungatanga, ako, aroha. That’s what we build our foundation on ... encouraging everyone to respect each other and know what everyone brings to the table.” (Kaiako 6)*

These practices included karakia, mihi, and connections to te Taiao, which supported learners’ cultural, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

*“We do karakia, we do mihi, we learn about the Atua, we learn about Te Taiao... what that looks like in terms of hauora, like the tapa whā.” (Kaiako 7)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *belonging, community, and shared responsibility*. These codes reflect the Kaupapa Māori principle of kotahitanga, where collective wellbeing is prioritised.

*“You see that sense of community when the kids help each other out—it’s part of who we are as a class, not just something we talk about.” (Kaiako 3)*

Participants described belonging as something actively created through everyday practices—greeting learners by name, integrating te reo Māori, and celebrating success. These actions reinforced that each learner contributes to the collective identity of the classroom.

Ultimately, this sub-theme highlights that culturally responsive practice is not only relational but also structural, shaping how learning environments are designed to support the holistic wellbeing and success of all learners.

#### **4.3 Theme 2: Normalising Te Reo Māori me Tikanga Māori**

This theme responds directly to the research questions, particularly in examining how kaiako enact culturally responsive pedagogy within their daily teaching practice. Across all participants, there was a clear and consistent emphasis on embedding te reo Māori and tikanga as normalised and integral aspects of classroom life, rather than as additional or separate components of the curriculum.

Participants, who were teaching across a range of English-medium primary contexts, described deliberate efforts to integrate Māori language, values, and practices into everyday routines. This reflects a shared understanding that culturally responsive teaching involves the active and ongoing inclusion of te ao Māori within all aspects of teaching and learning.

*“We start with a mihi, then karakia, then a waiata ... The kids learn so quickly. You hear them kōrero Māori naturally as it comes.” (Kaiako 3)*

From an analytical perspective, this theme was developed through repeated coding of references to *routine use of te reo Māori, tikanga practices, and normalisation of Māori*

*culture*. These codes were grouped to form a broader pattern highlighting the intentional embedding of Māori ways of being within classroom environments. Participants also described a cumulative effect over time, where consistent exposure led to increased learner confidence and understanding. This suggests that culturally responsive practice is not achieved through isolated lessons, but through sustained, everyday integration.

*“Even if they don’t understand in term one, by term four they’re quite familiar with the terminology and how it all connects up.” (Kaiako 1)*

#### **4.3.1 Sub-Theme 1: Embedding Tikanga through Routine**

This sub-theme illustrates how tikanga Māori is enacted through consistent classroom routines, aligning with the research focus on how culturally responsive practice is lived on a daily basis. Participants described the use of karakia, mihi, and waiata as grounding practices that support both cultural continuity and emotional regulation within the classroom.

Kaiako across varying levels of experience highlighted that these practices were not simply ritualistic, but carried deeper cultural and ethical significance.

*“If we don’t start with a mihi or karakia, the day feels off. When we do, it’s calm ... everyone knows who they are and where they’re from.” (Kaiako 7)*

*“We’ve got our karakia up and with our mana oranga, we’ve got the different Atua as well ... so everybody feels that the space is theirs.” (Kaiako 1)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *daily routines, cultural grounding, and inclusive environments*. These patterns demonstrate how tikanga contributes to creating spaces where learners feel a sense of belonging and connection.

The inclusion of Atua Māori and visual representations of tikanga reflects a holistic worldview, where wellbeing (mana oranga) is connected to spirituality, environment, and identity. This moves beyond symbolic inclusion toward culturally sustaining practice, where Māori values are actively lived within the classroom.

Participants consistently described how these practices created calm, inclusive environments where learners felt acknowledged and supported.

### ***4.3.2 Sub-Theme 2: Te Reo Māori as an Everyday Language***

This sub-theme further explores how kaiako enact culturally responsive pedagogy through the normalisation of te reo Māori in everyday interactions. This aligns closely with the research question focused on how culturally responsive teaching is implemented in practice.

Participants described intentionally integrating te reo Māori across all aspects of classroom communication, moving beyond basic greetings to include instructional language and informal kōrero.

*“There’s a lot of instructional reo I give my kids ... ‘Titiro ki te pouaka whakaata’— look at the TV. It sits beyond ‘kia ora’; they just pick it up so quickly.” (Kaiako 8)*

*“From the first year I started teaching, I told myself to incorporate as much te reo in our classroom routines as I could.” (Kaiako 6)*

From an analytical perspective, this sub-theme was constructed through codes such as *language normalisation*, *teacher modelling*, and *repetition*. These codes highlight that language acquisition occurs through consistent exposure and meaningful use, rather than isolated instruction.

Participants observed that when te reo Māori was embedded within everyday practice, learners began to use it more confidently and naturally. This suggests that culturally responsive teaching supports not only language development but also cultural identity and belonging.

### ***4.3.3 Sub-Theme 3: Celebrating Cultural Events***

This sub-theme highlights how kaiako utilise cultural events as opportunities to reinforce identity, belonging, and collective pride. This connects to the research focus on how culturally responsive practice is enacted both within and beyond the classroom.

Participants described events such as Matariki and kapa haka as meaningful opportunities to centre Māori culture within school life. These events were framed not as isolated celebrations, but as extensions of everyday culturally responsive practice.

*“We do a big event here for Matariki ... now there’s a lot more celebration of all cultures.” (Kaiako 3)*

*“We made all of our Year 6s do kapa haka to start off the year ... as a result, even non-Māori kids joined in and felt proud.” (Kaiako 8)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *cultural celebration, collective participation, and identity affirmation*. These patterns demonstrate how shared cultural experiences contribute to social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

Participants also acknowledged the limitations of event-based approaches when not supported by everyday practice.

*“Maybe they should embrace it every day and not for that specific week.” (Kaiako 7)*

This highlights a critical tension within culturally responsive practice—between symbolic recognition and sustained integration. Participants emphasised that cultural responsiveness is most effective when it is embedded consistently, rather than confined to specific events or weeks.

#### **4.3.4 Sub-Theme 4: *Te Tiriti and Curricular Commitment***

This sub-theme reflects how kaiako connect their practice to the broader obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, aligning with the research question focused on how culturally responsive teaching is understood and enacted.

Participants described actively integrating the principles of partnership, participation, and protection into their teaching, positioning Te Tiriti as both a conceptual framework and a practical guide.

*“I always talk about the three principles—participation, partnership, protection. I tell the kids this is what our education is based on.” (Kaiako 8)*

Analytically, this sub-theme was developed through codes such as *Te Tiriti awareness, equity, and shared responsibility*. These codes highlight how kaiako frame culturally responsive practice as a collective and ongoing responsibility.

*“It’s not just Māori who need to know this—it’s all of us.” (Kaiako 3)*

Participants emphasised that embedding Te Tiriti within classroom practice enabled meaningful discussions about equity, identity, and responsibility. This positions culturally responsive teaching not as an optional approach, but as a constitutional and ethical obligation grounded in Aotearoa’s bicultural context.

#### **4.4 Theme 3: Student Agency and Tuakiritanga (Identity)**

This theme responds directly to the research questions, particularly in exploring how kaiako understand and enact culturally responsive pedagogy in ways that support Māori learner identity and agency. Across all participants, student agency and tuakiritanga (identity) emerged as central to culturally responsive practice, reflecting the Kaupapa Māori principle of tino rangatiratanga — the right of Māori learners to exercise autonomy and self-determination within their education.

Participants, teaching across diverse English-medium primary contexts, described a deliberate shift away from teacher-centred approaches toward more student-centred practices. This shift reflects a growing awareness of the need to disrupt traditional Western models of schooling that prioritise control and standardisation, in favour of approaches that centre learner voice, identity, and experience.

*“I’ve shifted from being teacher-centred or teacher-driven to being real student-centred. I’ve been giving more student agency, allowing them to take control of their learning and what they learn at home.” (Kaiako 7)*

From an analytical perspective, this theme was developed through repeated coding of concepts such as *student voice*, *ownership of learning*, and *identity affirmation*. These codes were grouped to reflect a broader pattern of kaiako repositioning learners as active agents within the learning process.

This shift aligns with the principle of ako, where teaching and learning are reciprocal, and where learners’ knowledge and lived experiences are valued. Participants described creating opportunities for tamariki to lead, reflect, and express their identities, supporting a move from passive participation to active engagement.

Kaiako also described intentionally integrating Māori and Pasifika narratives within curriculum materials, enabling learners to see themselves reflected in their learning.

*“I’ve got a student who’s been doing a lot of fishing... they’re able to relate to the stories and those characters from the journals... especially with Māori and Pasifika journals.” (Kaiako 6)*

In addition to academic engagement, participants emphasised the importance of cultural and emotional safety. This was reflected in efforts to create environments where Māori learners could express their identity without needing to adapt or conceal aspects of who they are.

*“Our taura do not need to remove their cloak when they walk into the room.” (Kaiako 8)*

This metaphor encapsulates a key finding: culturally responsive practice involves creating spaces where learners’ whakapapa, identity, and worldview are not only acknowledged but upheld. Participants consistently described a commitment to affirming identity as an essential component of learner wellbeing and success.

*“It’s good for us to be who we are and practise what we do.” (Kaiako 5)*

*“Acknowledging the culture that they bring to the classroom.” (Kaiako 6)*

Kaiako also reflected on their own professional growth, noting increased intentionality in affirming Māori identity over time. This suggests that culturally responsive practice is an evolving process, shaped through reflection, experience, and ongoing learning.

#### **4.4.1 Sub-Theme 1: Culturally Grounded Confidence**

This sub-theme highlights how culturally responsive practices contribute to the development of student confidence and identity, aligning with the research focus on learner outcomes within culturally responsive environments.

Participants described how the consistent affirmation of Māori culture and language supported learners to develop a stronger sense of self and belonging. These practices were not viewed as additional, but as essential to holistic student wellbeing.

*“Encouraging them to speak their language, encouraging them to share back things from their culture, and just really trying to relate teaching to the kids and their world views.” (Kaiako 6)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *confidence*, *belonging*, and *identity affirmation*. These patterns indicate that when learners see their culture reflected in the classroom, they develop what one participant described as a “quiet confidence.”

*“The reo and tikanga have become normal for everyone now... it’s part of the rhythm of our day.” (Kaiako 1)*

*“I’ve seen kids stand taller during mihi time.” (Kaiako 3)*

Participants highlighted that these practices enabled learners to feel not only included, but affirmed, reinforcing their right to participate fully as themselves within the learning environment.

#### **4.4.2 Sub-Theme 2: Student Leadership in Haka me Waiata**

This sub-theme demonstrates how kaiako enact culturally responsive pedagogy by creating opportunities for student leadership within cultural practices. This aligns with the research question focused on how agency is fostered in classroom contexts.

Participants described shifting from teacher-led to learner-led approaches, particularly within kapa haka, karakia, and mihi. These opportunities allowed students to take ownership of cultural expression and leadership.

*“He’s not Māori, but he’s got mana ... I said, ‘okay, you lead us’...” (Kaiako 8)*

*“We’ve got all of their waiata online... the whole school gets involved in kapa haka.” (Kaiako 3)*

From an analytical perspective, this sub-theme was developed through codes such as *student leadership*, *participation*, and *shared ownership*. These patterns highlight how cultural practices become spaces for identity-building and empowerment.

Participants noted that these leadership opportunities challenged deficit assumptions and positioned learners as capable contributors within the classroom. This reflects broader expressions of tino rangatiratanga, where students are recognised as knowledgeable and empowered.

#### ***4.4.3 Sub-Theme 3: Valuing Multiple Identities***

This sub-theme reflects how kaiako navigate and honour the diverse identities present within their classrooms, aligning with the research focus on culturally responsive practice in multicultural contexts.

Participants acknowledged that their classrooms included learners from a range of cultural backgrounds and described the importance of creating inclusive environments where all identities were valued.

*“We’ve got Vietnamese, Cook Islands, Māori... about four or five cultures. It’s been about being open-minded.” (Kaiako 1)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *diversity*, *inclusion*, and *cultural recognition*. These patterns indicate that culturally responsive practice involves recognising and valuing multiple identities, rather than privileging a single cultural narrative.

Participants described intentionally creating space for learners to share their experiences and cultural knowledge, which supported both individual expression and collective understanding.

*“Some families know both... they embrace what’s closest to home.” (Kaiako 5)*

Kaiako observed that when learners were given opportunities to express their identities, they became more confident and engaged. These findings suggest that culturally responsive teaching supports both individual agency and collective belonging.

#### **4.5 Theme 4: Systemic Barriers and Support**

This theme responds directly to the research questions, particularly in examining the factors that support or hinder the enactment of culturally responsive pedagogy within

mainstream schooling contexts. While participants demonstrated a strong commitment to culturally responsive practice, they also identified a range of systemic barriers that influenced their ability to sustain this mahi.

Across participants, there was a consistent tension between individual teacher commitment and broader institutional conditions. Kaiako, working across English-medium primary settings, described experiences of tokenism, limited professional learning opportunities, and resistance from colleagues, whānau, and wider school communities. These findings suggest that culturally responsive practice is not solely dependent on individual teacher capability, but is shaped by the structural and ideological context of schooling.

From an analytical perspective, this theme emerged through repeated coding of concepts such as *institutional resistance*, *tokenism*, *lack of support*, and *system constraints*. These codes were grouped to reflect a broader pattern of systemic misalignment between Kaupapa Māori principles and mainstream educational structures.

Participants highlighted that Māori culture was often positioned superficially within schools, appearing in isolated events such as Matariki rather than being embedded consistently within everyday practice. This reflects an ongoing tension between symbolic recognition and meaningful integration of te ao Māori.

#### ***4.5.1 Sub-Theme 1: Leadership and Resourcing***

This sub-theme highlights the critical role of leadership and resourcing in enabling culturally responsive practice, aligning with the research focus on the conditions that support effective implementation.

Participants described how strong leadership—particularly in schools where Māori values were embedded in strategic direction—created environments where culturally grounded practices could thrive.

*“We have a kapa haka tutor come in every Friday. The whole school’s involved—it’s part of our culture now.” (Kaiako 2)*

*“Our school values are based on Māori concepts ... that foundation really helps.” (Kaiako 7)*

Kaiako in these contexts, including both experienced and early-career teachers, reported feeling supported and confident in enacting culturally responsive approaches.

In contrast, participants working in less supportive environments described significant challenges.

*“If your leaders don’t back it, it’s really hard. You’re left to figure it all out yourself.”*  
(Kaiako 2)

*“A lot of it depends on the teacher, not the school.”* (Kaiako 4)

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *leadership support, resourcing, and institutional responsibility*. These patterns highlight that leadership plays a pivotal role in either enabling or constraining culturally responsive practice.

Participants also described the emotional and practical burden placed on individual teachers when systemic support was lacking, indicating that responsibility for this mahi is often unevenly distributed.

#### **4.5.2 Sub-Theme 2: Tokenism**

This sub-theme reflects the challenges kaiako faced in navigating resistance and superficial engagement with Māori content, aligning with the research question focused on barriers to culturally responsive teaching.

Participants described instances where Māori language and tikanga were questioned or resisted by colleagues and whānau, revealing broader societal attitudes toward te ao Māori within education.

*“We got kickback because a child said, ‘My dad said I don’t have to learn this language.’”* (Kaiako 2)

*“Another kaiako asked, ‘Why do we have to do it? Because it’s Māori?’”* (Kaiako 7)

Analytically, this sub-theme was constructed through codes such as *resistance, deficit attitudes, and tokenism*. These patterns suggest that culturally responsive practice is often undermined by deeply embedded beliefs about the value and place of Māori knowledge within schooling.

Participants also highlighted that Māori content was frequently confined to specific events or weeks, rather than being integrated into everyday teaching. This reinforces tokenistic approaches that limit the depth and impact of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Kaiako described the challenges of navigating these tensions, particularly in contexts where expectations were unclear or inconsistently upheld. These experiences contributed to feelings of uncertainty and, at times, isolation.

#### ***4.5.3 Sub-Theme 3: Curriculum Constraints and Time Pressures***

This sub-theme explores how structural demands within schooling limit the consistent enactment of culturally responsive practice, directly addressing the research focus on systemic barriers.

Participants consistently described the challenge of balancing curriculum expectations with their commitment to culturally grounded teaching.

*“It can be tricky because there’s always something else to juggle.” (Kaiako 1)*

*“I’d imagined I’d offer te reo Māori as a subject... but the system demands me to prioritise other things.” (Kaiako 8)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *time constraints*, *curriculum pressure*, and *competing priorities*. These patterns indicate that the barriers experienced by kaiako are not due to a lack of willingness, but rather a structural misalignment within the education system.

Participants described how these pressures often resulted in culturally responsive practices being implemented inconsistently, rather than as sustained, embedded approaches.

*“Other things pile on top of everyday duties.” (Kaiako 7)*

These findings highlight the need for systemic change to ensure that culturally responsive pedagogy is prioritised and supported within curriculum frameworks.

#### **4.5.4 Sub-Theme 4: Lack of whānau engagement**

This sub-theme reflects the complexities of building meaningful partnerships with whānau, aligning with the research focus on relational aspects of culturally responsive practice.

Participants described challenges in establishing consistent and reciprocal relationships with whānau, particularly when engagement was limited or communication opportunities were constrained.

*“I don’t know them well enough ... learning about them, learning about me, these are learning opportunities.” (Kaiako 2)*

*“Some of the parents don’t show up.” (Kaiako 5)*

Analytically, this sub-theme was developed through codes such as *limited engagement, communication barriers, and missed opportunities for partnership*. These patterns suggest that while kaiako value whānau relationships, systemic factors often limit the development of these connections.

Participants noted that engagement with whānau often occurred in response to issues or concerns, rather than as part of ongoing, strengths-based relationship building. This highlights a disconnect between the aspirations of culturally responsive practice and the realities of school structures.

Kaiako expressed a desire for more meaningful and consistent engagement with whānau, recognising that strong partnerships are essential for supporting both learner wellbeing and achievement.

#### **4.6 Theme 5: Teacher Growth and Reflective Practice**

This theme responds directly to the research questions, particularly in exploring how kaiako understand and develop culturally responsive practice over time. Across all participants, culturally responsive pedagogy was described not as a fixed skillset, but as an ongoing journey of growth, reflection, and learning.

Participants, working across a range of English-medium primary contexts, consistently emphasised that their understanding of cultural responsiveness had evolved through both professional and personal experiences. This highlights that culturally responsive teaching is dynamic, requiring continuous engagement with te ao Māori and an openness to change.

*“Culturally responsive means constantly evolving ... being willing to explore, to have an open mind about where different tamariki come from.” (Kaiako 1)*

From an analytical perspective, this theme was developed through repeated coding of concepts such as *ongoing learning*, *self-reflection*, and *professional growth*. These codes were grouped to reflect a broader pattern of kaiako positioning themselves as learners within their own practice.

Participants acknowledged gaps in their knowledge and described actively seeking opportunities to deepen their understanding through wānanga, professional development, and engagement with iwi. This reflects the Kaupapa Māori principle of ako, where learning is reciprocal and ongoing.

#### ***4.6.1 Sub-Theme 1: Learning Through Professional Development***

This sub-theme highlights the role of structured professional learning in supporting culturally responsive practice, aligning with the research focus on how kaiako develop capability in this area.

Participants described engaging in formal professional development opportunities such as courses, noho marae, and iwi-led initiatives, which contributed to their growing understanding of te ao Māori.

*“We did a Te Ahu course; it was compulsory for all educators. And we did a noho marae which was really cool.” (Kaiako 1)*

*“We’ve had a lot of connections with local iwi... making sure we’re authentically trying to be culturally responsive.” (Kaiako 8)*

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *professional learning*, *iwi engagement*, and *cultural grounding*. These patterns indicate that learning experiences grounded in local contexts were particularly impactful.

Participants emphasised the value of learning directly from mana whenua, noting that this strengthened their confidence and supported them to incorporate local narratives, language, and tikanga into their teaching. Immersive experiences such as noho marae were described as especially significant, as they enabled kaiako to engage with tikanga in practice rather than theory alone. These findings suggest that effective professional learning for culturally responsive pedagogy is relational, contextual, and grounded in local knowledge systems.

#### ***4.6.2 Sub-Theme 2: Learning Through Whanaungatanga***

This sub-theme reflects the importance of relational learning among kaiako, aligning with the research question focused on how culturally responsive practice is sustained in everyday contexts.

Participants described how informal networks and whakawhanaungatanga with colleagues supported their ongoing development, particularly in environments where formal professional learning was limited.

*“We get together once a month and talk about resources... we help each other out.”*  
(Kaiako 7)

*“We have a Māori bilingual unit who assist us... we go to them for resources or karakia.”* (Kaiako 6)

From an analytical perspective, this sub-theme was developed through codes such as *peer support*, *collaborative learning*, and *shared practice*. These patterns highlight that learning is strengthened through collective engagement rather than individual effort.

Kaiako described these spaces as essential for both practical and emotional support. In contexts where individual teachers often carried responsibility for culturally responsive initiatives, these relationships helped to sustain motivation and confidence. This reflects the

principle of ako, where knowledge is shared and co-constructed, and highlights the importance of relational networks in sustaining culturally responsive practice.

#### ***4.6.3 Sub-Theme: Reflective Practice***

This sub-theme highlights the role of critical reflection as central to culturally responsive teaching, directly addressing the research focus on how kaiako develop and refine their practice.

Participants described reflection as an ongoing, deeply personal process that involved examining their own assumptions, responding to learner needs, and making intentional changes to their teaching.

*“Culturally responsive means constantly evolving... being willing to explore.”*  
(Kaiako 5)

*“Such a shift in understanding the deeper complexities... I see you, you see me, and how can we work with where we’re at?”* (Kaiako 1)

Analytically, this sub-theme emerged from codes such as *self-reflection*, *adaptation*, and *critical awareness*. These patterns indicate that culturally responsive practice requires ongoing reflexivity and a willingness to engage with discomfort and uncertainty.

Participants described reflection as both an individual and collective process, shaped through interactions with tamariki, whānau, and colleagues. This aligns with the Kaupapa Māori principle of ako, where learning is relational and reciprocal.

Kaiako also highlighted that reflective practice required vulnerability, as it often involved recognising limitations and confronting deeply held assumptions. However, these processes were described as essential for growth and transformation. These findings suggest that reflective practice functions as both a navigational tool and an ethical responsibility, guiding kaiako toward more intentional, culturally sustaining approaches to teaching.

## **4.7 Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings from eight kaiako, analysed through a Kaupapa Māori thematic framework and organised in response to the research questions guiding this study. The findings provide insight into how kaiako understand culturally responsive practice and how this is enacted within their everyday teaching contexts.

Across the data, culturally responsive practice was consistently described by kaiako as relational, embedded in everyday interactions, and shaped by both individual commitment and wider systemic conditions. Relationships were positioned as central to practice, supporting trust, belonging, and meaningful engagement within classroom contexts.

A second key theme, student agency and tuakiritanga (identity), highlighted how kaiako created opportunities for learners to express and affirm their cultural identities. Practices such as karakia, kapa haka, and student-led cultural expression were described as contributing to learner confidence, pride, and engagement.

The role of leadership and resourcing further influenced how culturally responsive practices were enacted. Where leadership aligned with Māori values and provided structural support, kaiako described feeling more confident in embedding these approaches. In contrast, limited support resulted in practice often being reliant on individual teacher commitment rather than sustained, school-wide approaches. Systemic barriers—including tokenism, competing curriculum demands, and challenges in whānau engagement—were also identified as factors shaping practice.

Finally, the theme of teacher growth and reflective practice captured the ongoing and evolving nature of this mahi. Kaiako described engaging in continuous learning through wānanga, professional development, and collaboration with colleagues and iwi. Reflection was identified as an ongoing process that supported the adaptation and development of practice.

Taken together, these themes illustrate how culturally responsive practice is understood and enacted by kaiako within mainstream primary school contexts, shaped by both relational approaches and wider systemic influences.

When considered in relation to the research questions guiding this study, these findings provide a clear and structured understanding of kaiako practice. In response to the first research question, the findings show that kaiako understand culturally responsive practice as relational, grounded in identity, and embedded within everyday interactions. In relation to the second research question, the data demonstrates how these understandings are enacted through practices that affirm Māori identity, support student agency, and integrate te reo Māori me ōna tikanga within classroom contexts. Finally, in response to the third research question, the findings highlight the range of supports and challenges that shape practice, including the influence of leadership, systemic conditions, and the ongoing need for professional learning and reflective practice. Together, these findings show how culturally responsive practice is both understood and enacted within the realities of mainstream primary schooling in Aotearoa.

## **CHAPTER 5- MATAPAKI: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter critically interprets the findings of this research through a Kaupapa Māori lens, positioning the data within broader theoretical and scholarly conversations. Rather than reiterating participant accounts, this chapter focuses on analysing what these insights reveal about culturally responsive practice within mainstream primary school settings in Aotearoa. In doing so, it examines how kaiako navigate, resist, and reshape education systems that remain influenced by colonial structures.

Kaupapa Māori theory underpins this discussion as both an ethical and analytical framework. Principles such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, aroha ki te tangata, ako, and tino rangatiratanga are not treated as descriptive themes, but as critical lenses through which kaiako practice is interpreted and understood (Smith, 2012; Pihama et al., 2019). Through this positioning, culturally responsive pedagogy is conceptualised as an enactment of tino rangatiratanga and mana Māori motuhake, rather than simply a set of teaching strategies.

This chapter is structured around five interrelated themes: Whanaungatanga, Normalising Te Reo Māori me ōna Tikanga, Student Agency and Identity, Systemic Barriers and Support, and Teacher Growth and Reflective Practice. Each section moves beyond description to examine how these themes align with, extend, or challenge existing literature discussed in Chapter Two. In particular, the analysis considers how kaiako practices both reflect and disrupt dominant educational norms, highlighting the ongoing tensions between transformative intent and systemic constraint.

Attention is also given to the implications of these findings for kaiako, school leadership, and wider educational policy, particularly in relation to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi in meaningful and sustained ways. The chapter concludes with a reflection on researcher positionality and the contribution of this study to ongoing discussions surrounding Māori educational success as Māori.

## **5.2 Interpreting Key Themes Through Kaupapa Māori Theory**

### ***5.2.1 Whanaungatanga: Relationships as the Heart of Pedagogy***

Whanaungatanga emerges in this study not simply as a relational practice, but as a critical enactment of Kaupapa Māori theory within mainstream schooling. Rather than functioning as a strategy to support engagement, it operates as an ethical and pedagogical foundation that challenges individualistic and deficit-oriented approaches to teaching and learning. In this way, relationships are repositioned as central to educational success, aligning with Smith's (2012) assertion that Māori-centred approaches must transform the conditions in which learning occurs, rather than merely adapting within them.

Through a Kaupapa Māori lens, whanaungatanga reflects interconnected principles of manaakitanga, aroha ki te tangata, and collective responsibility. The emphasis placed on relational trust and reciprocity aligns with Bishop and Berryman (2006), who argue that educational success for Māori is grounded in relationships that position learners as culturally located and inherently capable. Similarly, Macfarlane (2015) highlights that effective pedagogy for Māori learners is built upon relational integrity, where power is shared and learning is co-constructed rather than controlled.

Importantly, the findings suggest that whanaungatanga operates as a form of resistance to dominant schooling norms. Mainstream education systems have historically prioritised standardisation, control, and individual achievement — values that often marginalise relational and collective ways of being. In contrast, the relational practices described by kaiako reflect a deliberate shift towards collectivism, where learning is embedded within relationships and shaped by shared responsibility. This aligns with Durie's (2001) concept of hauora, which positions wellbeing as multidimensional and deeply relational. Within this framing, academic success cannot be separated from emotional, social, and cultural wellbeing.

Whanaungatanga also extends beyond classroom interactions, highlighting the importance of authentic partnerships with whānau and wider communities. The emphasis on reciprocal engagement reinforces findings from Berryman et al. (2018) and Epstein (2011), who emphasise that meaningful home–school relationships are central to student success. However, from a Kaupapa Māori perspective, these relationships are not simply supportive mechanisms; they are sites of shared knowledge production, where whānau expertise is

recognised as legitimate and essential (Cram, 2009). This challenges traditional hierarchies of knowledge within schooling and supports a more equitable distribution of power. Taken together, these insights suggest that whanaungatanga is not an “add-on” to pedagogy, but a transformative approach that redefines the purpose and practice of teaching. It enables kaiako to create learning environments where Māori learners can experience belonging, affirmation, and success as Māori, while simultaneously disrupting deficit narratives that have historically shaped mainstream education.

### ***5.2.2 Normalising Te Reo Māori me ōna Tikanga: From Tokenism to Everyday Practice***

The normalisation of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga emerges in this study as a critical shift from symbolic inclusion toward transformative pedagogical practice. Rather than being positioned as occasional or celebratory elements, language and tikanga are embedded within the everyday rhythms of classroom life. Through a Kaupapa Māori lens, this shift represents more than increased visibility; it reflects a reorientation of power, where Māori language, knowledge, and ways of being are centred rather than marginalised. In this way, normalisation becomes an enactment of tino rangatiratanga within schooling contexts (Smith, 2012)

This finding aligns with Hond’s (2013) concept of *whakanuia te reo*, which emphasises that language revitalisation is sustained through consistent, everyday use rather than intermittent or tokenistic practices. The movement away from “culture weeks” toward daily integration signals a transition from performative inclusion to meaningful, lived practice. As argued by Berryman (2014) and Macfarlane (2004), culturally responsive pedagogy requires more than acknowledgement of Māori identity; it demands the intentional and sustained embedding of te reo Māori me tikanga within teaching and learning processes.

From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, the incorporation of te reo and tikanga into everyday practice also reflects the interconnected principles of manaakitanga, wairuatanga, and ako. The use of karakia, mihi, and waiata contributes to the cultivation of mauri within the learning environment, fostering a sense of collective wellbeing and spiritual grounding (Henare, 2001). This positions language not only as a communicative tool, but as a carrier of identity, values, and relational connection. As such, the normalisation of te reo Māori supports the development of culturally affirming spaces in which Māori learners can see and hear themselves reflected in authentic and sustained ways.

More importantly, this shift can also be understood as a response to the historical marginalisation of te reo Māori within mainstream education. The privileging of English within schooling has long contributed to the erosion of Māori language and identity, reinforcing deficit positioning and cultural disconnection. By embedding te reo Māori within everyday classroom practice, kaiako actively disrupt these patterns, contributing to the restoration of linguistic and cultural balance. This aligns with wider scholarship that positions language revitalisation as central to Māori educational success and self-determination (Berryman, 2014; Macfarlane, 2004).

However, the findings also suggest that normalisation is not without tension. The shift from tokenism to authentic integration requires ongoing commitment, confidence, and support, particularly for kaiako working within systems that have not historically prioritised te reo Māori. This highlights the importance of sustained professional learning and systemic backing to ensure that normalisation is not dependent on individual effort alone. Within this context, the everyday use of te reo Māori becomes both a pedagogical practice and a political act—one that affirms Māori identity, challenges dominant norms, and contributes to the ongoing realisation of tino rangatiratanga in education.

### ***5.2.3 Student Agency and Identity: Tino Rangatiratanga in Action***

Student agency and identity emerge in this study as central to the enactment of tino rangatiratanga within classroom practice. Rather than positioning learners as passive recipients of knowledge, the findings indicate a shift toward pedagogies grounded in ako, where teaching and learning are reciprocal, relational, and co-constructed. Through a Kaupapa Māori lens, this shift represents a move away from teacher-dominated models toward learning environments that recognise ākongā as knowledge holders with legitimate cultural identities and perspectives (Smith, 2012).

This aligns with the work of Bishop et al. (2009), who argue that Māori learner success is strengthened when students are positioned as active participants in their learning, rather than as subjects of instructional control. In this context, student agency is not simply about choice or voice; it reflects deeper commitments to mana motuhake and self-determination. When learners are supported to bring their full identities into the classroom,

they are affirmed as culturally located individuals whose knowledge and experiences are integral to the learning process.

From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, the affirmation of identity is inseparable from wellbeing and belonging. This is reflected in Durie's (2001) model of *Te Whare Tapa Whā*, which emphasises the interconnectedness of social, emotional, spiritual, and physical dimensions of wellbeing. When classrooms create space for learners to express who they are, these dimensions are strengthened, supporting not only engagement but also holistic development. In this way, culturally responsive pedagogy fosters environments where learners feel secure in their identity and confident to participate fully.

The relationship between identity affirmation and engagement is further supported by broader educational literature. Vygotsky (1978) highlights the importance of social interaction in learning, while Gay (2010) argues that culturally responsive teaching enhances motivation and participation by validating learners' cultural backgrounds. Within this study, the centring of identity contributes to what Macfarlane (2004) describes as *mauri ora*, where the learning environment supports relational balance and collective wellbeing.

Importantly, the promotion of student agency extends beyond Māori learners, reflecting the inclusive potential of bicultural practice. When all ākonga are invited to engage with te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, classrooms become spaces of shared learning and mutual respect. This aligns with Bishop and Berryman's (2006) emphasis on dialogic pedagogy, where students and teachers co-construct knowledge, as well as Nieto's (2010) argument that culturally inclusive environments benefit all learners. Such practices foster empathy, confidence, and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives.

However, the enactment of student agency within mainstream schooling is not without complexity. Traditional schooling structures often prioritise control, standardisation, and compliance, which can limit opportunities for genuine learner autonomy. Within this context, creating space for student voice and leadership requires kaiako to intentionally challenge these norms and reimagine classroom power dynamics. This highlights that fostering tino rangatiratanga is not simply a pedagogical choice, but a deliberate and ongoing act of transformation.

Overall, these findings suggest that when kaiako centre student voice, identity, and cultural knowledge within their practice, classrooms become sites where tino rangatiratanga can be meaningfully enacted. In doing so, they support the development of confident, connected learners who are empowered to participate as themselves within the learning environment, reinforcing the broader aspirations of Māori educational success as Māori.

#### ***5.2.4 Systemic Barriers and Support: Negotiating Tension and Tokenism***

Systemic barriers emerge in this study as significant constraints on the enactment and sustainability of culturally responsive pedagogy within mainstream schooling. While kaiako demonstrate strong commitment to practices grounded in te ao Māori, these efforts are often shaped—and at times limited—by institutional structures that continue to reflect colonial priorities. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, these tensions highlight the misalignment between transformative pedagogical intent and the enduring influence of systems that privilege standardisation, accountability, and Eurocentric norms (Smith, 2012). These findings align with May and Sleeter’s (2010) assertion that equity-focused educational policies frequently fail to translate into meaningful practice at the school level. Similarly, Bishop and Berryman (2006) argue that entrenched schooling structures can constrain teachers seeking to centre Māori learners’ identities and aspirations. Within this study, the presence of rigid curricula, time pressures, and limited institutional support reflects this disconnect, reinforcing the notion that culturally responsive teaching is often positioned at the margins rather than embedded within core practice.

A key tension identified is the reliance on individual kaiako to drive culturally responsive initiatives in the absence of systemic support. This reflects a broader pattern in which the responsibility for transformation is unevenly distributed, frequently falling on those most committed to change. From a Kaupapa Māori standpoint, this individualisation of responsibility contradicts principles of collective accountability and shared commitment, such as whanaungatanga and kotahitanga. It also risks perpetuating inequities by making culturally responsive practice dependent on personal capacity rather than structural expectation. Leadership emerges as a critical enabler in either reinforcing or disrupting these systemic constraints. Where school leaders actively model and prioritise values grounded in te ao Māori—such as manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and collective responsibility—culturally responsive practices are more likely to be sustained and normalised across the school. In

contrast, the absence of such leadership often results in fragmented or isolated efforts, limiting the potential for long-term, school-wide transformation. This highlights the importance of leadership as a site of influence in shaping school culture and aligning practice with Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments.

The findings also point to the persistence of colonising ideologies within schooling communities, which can manifest as resistance to the inclusion of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori. Such resistance reflects longstanding hierarchies of knowledge that continue to privilege dominant cultural norms while marginalising Māori ways of knowing. Durie (2019) emphasises that genuine bicultural partnership requires the integration of Māori knowledge systems at the foundational level of education, rather than their treatment as supplementary or optional. Within this framing, tokenistic approaches to cultural inclusion can be understood as a continuation of colonial patterns, rather than a disruption of them. Taken together, these insights suggest that culturally responsive pedagogy cannot be sustained through individual effort alone. Meaningful transformation requires systemic change that is grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, supported by committed and culturally responsive leadership, and resourced in ways that enable equitable practice. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, this involves reimagining education systems so that Māori knowledge, language, and values are not peripheral, but central to the design and enactment of schooling. Without such shifts, culturally responsive teaching risks remaining aspirational rather than fully realised.

### ***5.2.5 Teacher Growth and Reflective Practice: Ako as Transformation***

Teacher growth and reflective practice emerge in this study as central to the ongoing enactment of culturally responsive pedagogy, with ako positioned as a transformative guiding principle. Rather than viewing professional learning as a linear or individual process, the findings indicate that kaiako engage in ongoing, relational, and reciprocal learning journeys. Through a Kaupapa Māori lens, ako reflects a dynamic process in which teaching and learning are interconnected, evolving, and grounded in relationships (Bishop, 2019).

Within this framework, reflection extends beyond technical evaluation of practice and is understood as an ethical and relational act. Grounded in principles such as aroha ki te tangata, reflective practice requires kaiako to engage with humility, openness, and a commitment to the wellbeing of others (Smith, 2012). This aligns with Cram's (2009) concept

of relational accountability, which emphasises the importance of critically examining one's own assumptions in order to uphold the mana of those with whom one works. In this sense, reflection becomes a necessary condition for culturally responsive practice, rather than an optional professional skill.

The emphasis on reflexivity also highlights the importance of confronting and unlearning deficit thinking. Bishop and Berryman (2006) argue that critical self-awareness is essential for disrupting entrenched beliefs that position Māori learners in deficit terms. Within this study, the willingness of kaiako to engage with discomfort and challenge their own perspectives reflects this deeper level of professional commitment. Such processes require more than surface-level reflection; they demand sustained engagement with the historical and structural conditions that shape educational inequities.

Importantly, the findings suggest that teacher growth is most effectively supported within collective contexts. Collaborative spaces such as wānanga and professional learning communities enable kaiako to share knowledge, reflect critically, and support one another in their development. This collective approach aligns with Kaupapa Māori principles of whanaungatanga and kotahitanga, reinforcing that transformation is not an individual endeavour but a shared responsibility. In contrast, isolated approaches to professional learning risk limiting the depth and sustainability of change.

From this perspective, professional learning can be understood as a process of both unlearning and relearning. Kaiako are required to critically examine dominant, often colonial, assumptions about teaching and learning, while simultaneously engaging with Māori worldviews as legitimate and authoritative sources of knowledge. This dual process reflects the transformative intent of Kaupapa Māori theory, which seeks not only to improve practice within existing systems, but to challenge and reshape the foundations upon which those systems are built (Smith, 2012).

Overall, these findings highlight that reflective practice, when grounded in ako, has the potential to support meaningful and sustained change. By engaging in ongoing, relational, and critically informed learning, kaiako are better positioned to enact culturally responsive pedagogy in ways that uphold Māori values, challenge inequities, and contribute to the realisation of Māori educational success as Māori.

### **5.3 Alignment with Literature and Theory**

The themes identified in this kaupapa align closely with established scholarship on culturally responsive pedagogy and Kaupapa Māori theory, while also extending this literature through their grounding in the lived experiences of kaiako in mainstream primary settings. Collectively, the analysis reinforces that culturally responsive education is not a discrete set of strategies, but a holistic, relational, and values-driven approach embedded in Māori worldviews. Principles such as whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, ako, tino rangatiratanga, and mana motuhake are evident not as abstract concepts, but as enacted practices that shape everyday teaching and learning.

The findings affirm the centrality of relationships within culturally responsive pedagogy, consistent with Macfarlane (2004), who highlights the role of culturally grounded interactions in fostering belonging and security, and Bishop and Berryman (2006), who emphasise the importance of power-sharing relationships in supporting Māori learner success. Similarly, Durie's (1998) holistic framing of wellbeing is reflected in the ways kaiako prioritise identity, connection, and learner autonomy as integral to educational achievement. At the same time, the systemic tensions identified—particularly those relating to leadership, curriculum constraints, and the inconsistent enactment of bicultural commitments—reinforce Smith's (2012) critique of the enduring influence of colonial structures within mainstream schooling. These tensions demonstrate that while kaiako may enact culturally responsive practices at the classroom level, their efforts are often shaped and constrained by broader institutional conditions. This highlights the need to understand culturally responsive pedagogy not only as a classroom-based approach, but as part of a wider project of systemic transformation aligned with Māori aspirations.

The findings also resonate with broader culturally responsive teaching scholarship. Gay (2010) argues that effective pedagogy requires educators to intentionally draw on learners' cultural knowledge and experiences, while Ladson-Billings (1995) identifies the interconnected goals of academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. Within this study, these principles are evident in the ways kaiako integrate identity, language, and relational practice into their teaching, often through everyday interactions that carry significant transformative potential. In this way, the findings extend existing literature by illustrating how theoretical concepts—such as relational pedagogy, language revitalisation,

identity affirmation, and reflective practice—are enacted within the constraints and possibilities of mainstream schooling. These practices demonstrate what Gay (2010) describes as cultural scaffolding, where relationships, language, and classroom climate are intentionally leveraged to support learner identity and achievement. This chapter therefore positions the experiences of kaiako as central to the ongoing development of culturally responsive theory and practice in Aotearoa, illustrating how theory and practice inform and strengthen one another in the pursuit of Māori educational success as Māori.

### ***5.3.1 Relational Pedagogy***

These findings reinforce that whanaungatanga is not simply a pedagogical strategy but a worldview that positions teaching and learning within networks of relationship and reciprocity. Through a Kaupapa Māori lens, this relational orientation reframes education as a collective endeavour, where knowledge is co-constructed and sustained through connections between ākongā, kaiako, whānau, and wider communities. When kaiako engage with learners through aroha, manaakitanga, and ngākau māhaki, they cultivate trust and belonging—conditions that are essential for meaningful and sustained learning.

This relational stance shifts the role of the teacher from sole authority to collaborator and co-learner, reflecting what Bishop and Berryman (2006) describe as a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations, where success is co-constructed through respect, shared power, and mutual accountability. In doing so, it also extends Macfarlane’s (2004) emphasis on culturally grounded practice that nurtures belonging and supports holistic wellbeing (hauora). Within this framing, learning is not an individual pursuit, but a relational process embedded within collective responsibility and cultural continuity.

Importantly, whanaungatanga extends beyond the classroom, reinforcing the centrality of whānau and community within the learning process. When kaiako engage in authentic partnerships with whānau, they disrupt traditional boundaries between home and school and affirm Māori ways of knowing, where education is understood as *he kaupapa tuku iho*—a shared, intergenerational responsibility. This aligns with Kaupapa Māori principles that position knowledge as relational, contextual, and collectively held, rather than individualised or institutionally owned.

The integration of te reo Māori within relational pedagogies further strengthens this approach by embedding language within meaningful social interactions. Rather than functioning as an isolated curriculum component, te reo Māori becomes a natural and relational medium through which connection, identity, and belonging are expressed. This aligns with broader literature on language revitalisation, which emphasises that sustained and authentic use within everyday contexts is critical to normalisation and learner engagement (Macfarlane, 2004; May & Hill, 2020). Within relational spaces, language is not simply learned but lived, reinforcing its role as a carrier of culture, identity, and collective meaning. Taken together, these findings highlight that relational pedagogy grounded in whanaungatanga creates the conditions for culturally responsive practice to flourish. By centring relationships, shared responsibility, and cultural connection, kaiako are able to foster learning environments that support both academic success and the holistic wellbeing of ākonga, while also contributing to the wider aspirations of Māori educational success as Māori.

### ***5.3.2 Language and Cultural Revitalisation***

The normalisation of te reo Māori within classroom practice aligns with May and Hill's (2020) argument that language revitalisation depends on sustained societal use rather than token inclusion. From this perspective, revitalisation cannot be achieved through isolated initiatives or symbolic gestures, but requires the integration of te reo Māori as a natural and unmarked part of everyday interaction, institutional practice, and social life. Within this study, such normalisation reflects a broader shift from performative inclusion toward meaningful and sustained engagement with language and culture. This aligns with Hond's (2013) concept of "everyday reo," which connects linguistic revitalisation with spiritual and relational wellbeing (*mauri ora*). Through a Kaupapa Māori lens, the use of te reo Māori is not simply a communicative act, but a restoration of identity, connection, and cultural continuity. In this sense, revitalisation operates as both a linguistic and cultural process, challenging the enduring legacy of assimilation policies and rebalancing power between English and Māori within educational contexts. This interpretation is consistent with Berryman's (2014) critique of the historical marginalisation of Māori language and knowledge, highlighting the need for schooling environments that actively restore mana and uphold Māori epistemologies.

Embedding te reo Māori and tikanga within everyday practice also reflects the enactment of tino rangatiratanga, as language becomes a living expression of Māori identity, knowledge, and sovereignty. Durie (1998) emphasises that identity, language, and wellbeing must be central to educational experiences, rather than positioned at the margins. Within this framework, the normalisation of te reo Māori signals a shift toward educational spaces that affirm Māori ways of being as legitimate, visible, and valued.

Importantly, the findings suggest that language revitalisation is a shared responsibility that extends beyond Māori educators alone. Gay (2010) argues that culturally responsive teaching requires all educators to actively draw on and integrate learners' cultural knowledge, while Ladson-Billings (1995) highlights the collective development of cultural competence as essential to equitable education. In this context, the incorporation of te reo Māori and tikanga by both Māori and non-Māori kaiako reflects a commitment to Treaty-based responsibilities, rather than acts of individual goodwill. This collective enactment aligns with Bishop and Berryman's (2006) pedagogy of relations, where mutual respect and shared accountability underpin meaningful educational change. Such approaches embody kotahitanga, fostering unity through shared purpose and ensuring that revitalisation is not confined to specialist roles but embedded across the wider school environment. Through this collective commitment, classrooms become sites where mana ōrite can be enacted, supporting the development of learning spaces that honour both Māori and Pākehā worldviews. In doing so, these practices contribute to the ongoing realisation of an education system that is authentically bilingual, bicultural, and reflective of Aotearoa's shared whakapapa.

### ***5.3.3 Agency and Identity***

The findings demonstrate that when kaiako intentionally create space for student leadership, ākonga are positioned as active contributors within the learning environment rather than passive recipients of knowledge. This reflects Gay's (2010) assertion that culturally responsive pedagogy must legitimise learners' knowledge, experiences, and perspectives as integral to the learning process. Through a Kaupapa Māori lens, this shift represents a reconfiguration of classroom power relations, where authority is shared and learners are recognised as culturally located individuals with agency and voice.

The movement away from teacher-directed models toward shared leadership reflects a commitment to mana motuhake, enabling learners to bring their whole selves into the learning space. In this context, agency is not limited to participation, but is understood as self-determination in action. This aligns with Bishop and Berryman's (2006) emphasis on relational and dialogic pedagogy, where learning is co-constructed through trust, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. By holding power in ways that are responsive and relational, kaiako create conditions in which learners can meaningfully contribute to their own learning journeys.

Tino rangatiratanga is also evident as both an individual and collective experience within the learning environment. Opportunities for cultural expression and leadership enable learners to affirm their identities while contributing to the relational and spiritual wellbeing of the group. This reflects Durie's (1998) model of *Te Whare Tapa Whā*, where identity, belonging, and wellbeing are interconnected and central to holistic development. When learners are supported to express their cultural identities, this strengthens both taha wairua and taha whānau, reinforcing the relationship between empowerment and belonging. Macfarlane (2004) similarly emphasises that culturally grounded practice enhances learners' sense of security, connectedness, and engagement.

Importantly, the development of agency and identity extends beyond Māori learners alone, reflecting the inclusive potential of culturally responsive pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally relevant teaching fosters cultural competence for all learners, while Bishop and Berryman (2006) highlight the importance of kotahitanga as unity achieved through shared learning. Within this context, identity becomes a site of connection rather than division, where all ākonga engage with te ao Māori in ways that foster empathy, understanding, and collective responsibility.

Overall, these findings illustrate that when kaiako embed Kaupapa Māori principles within their practice, the development of student agency becomes a pathway toward tino rangatiratanga. Rather than simply enhancing engagement, these approaches support the creation of learning environments where all ākonga can stand confidently in their identities and contribute to a shared sense of purpose and collective uplift within Aotearoa's classrooms.

### *5.3.4 Systemic Barriers*

The findings indicate that inconsistent leadership and surface-level engagement with te ao Māori continue to shape the enactment of culturally responsive practice within mainstream schooling. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, this reflects a broader misalignment between espoused values and institutional structures, where Māori principles are acknowledged rhetorically but are not embedded within the systems that guide everyday practice. This aligns with Smith's (2012) critique that mainstream education often adopts Māori concepts symbolically, without enacting the structural changes required to support genuine transformation.

Such conditions contribute to the marginal positioning of Māori knowledge within schooling, reinforcing patterns identified by Berryman (2014), where culturally responsive practices are fragmented and inconsistently implemented. The absence of coherent policy, resourcing, and leadership commitment limits the extent to which kaiako are able to sustain meaningful change, positioning culturally responsive pedagogy as peripheral rather than central to educational practice.

A key tension highlighted within the findings is the individualisation of responsibility for culturally responsive teaching. When system-level support is limited, the burden of transformation is placed on individual kaiako, rather than being shared across the wider school structure. This reflects May and Sleeter's (2010) observation that equity-oriented policies are often unevenly enacted, leaving teachers to navigate systemic constraints independently. From a Kaupapa Māori standpoint, this contradicts principles of collective responsibility and shared accountability, such as whanaungatanga and kotahitanga.

The role of leadership is therefore critical in either reinforcing or disrupting these systemic barriers. Where leadership actively embeds te ao Māori values within school structures, culturally responsive practice is more likely to be sustained and normalised. In contrast, the absence of such leadership contributes to fragmented implementation and limits the potential for long-term change. This reinforces Bishop and Berryman's (2006) argument that meaningful transformation requires collective commitment and systemic coherence, rather than reliance on individual effort. Taken together, these findings highlight that culturally responsive pedagogy cannot be sustained through isolated practice alone.

Meaningful change requires alignment across leadership, policy, and resourcing, ensuring that Māori values and knowledge systems are embedded within the foundations of schooling. Without such alignment, culturally responsive practice risks remaining aspirational rather than fully realised within mainstream education.

### ***5.3.5 Reflective Practice***

Reflective practice emerges in this study as a central mechanism through which culturally responsive pedagogy is sustained and deepened, with *ako* positioned as a transformative and relational process. This aligns with Pihama et al. (2019), who conceptualise *wānanga ako* as a continuous, collective process of critical reflection grounded in Māori epistemologies. Within this kaupapa, reflective practice extends beyond individual introspection, operating instead as a shared, relational, and emotionally engaged process through which kaiako learn, unlearn, and realign their practice.

From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, reflection is understood as an ethical and relational act, shaped through *kōrero*, shared experience, and collective inquiry. These reflective spaces enable kaiako to critically engage with the tensions between institutional expectations and their own cultural values, creating opportunities to realign practice with principles such as *aroha ki te tangata*, *manaakitanga*, and *whanaungatanga*. In this way, reflection becomes integral to the enactment of culturally responsive pedagogy, rather than an additional or optional component of professional practice.

Importantly, this process of reflection involves both learning and unlearning. Kaiako are required to critically examine dominant assumptions and deficit discourses, while simultaneously engaging with Māori worldviews as legitimate and authoritative sources of knowledge. This dual process reflects the transformative intent of Kaupapa Māori theory, which seeks not only to improve practice within existing systems, but to challenge and reshape the conditions that produce inequity (Smith, 2012). Within this framing, reflective practice can also be understood as an act of resistance and renewal. By engaging in collective, kaupapa-driven reflection, kaiako are able to navigate systemic constraints while maintaining their ethical and cultural integrity. This highlights that meaningful change does not occur through isolated action, but through ongoing, relational processes of dialogue, courage, and shared learning.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that reflective practice grounded in ako and wānanga creates the conditions for sustained transformation. Through collective, critically informed engagement, kaiako are better positioned to enact culturally responsive pedagogy in ways that uphold Māori values, challenge inequities, and contribute to Māori educational success as Māori.

## **5.4 Implications for Practice and Policy**

The findings of this kaupapa have important implications for educational practice and policy within mainstream schooling in Aotearoa. Interpreted through a Kaupapa Māori lens, these implications extend beyond classroom-level change to highlight the need for alignment across kaiako practice, school leadership, and wider system structures. The analysis demonstrates that culturally responsive pedagogy cannot be sustained through individual effort alone, but requires collective responsibility, relational commitment, and systemic support grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The following sections outline key implications for kaiako, school leadership, and policy, emphasising the conditions necessary to support Māori educational success as Māori.

### ***5.4.1 For Kaiako***

The findings indicate that kaiako require sustained, localised professional learning that moves beyond procedural compliance and one-off workshops to support genuine cultural transformation. When professional development is framed as a requirement rather than a relational and reflective process, it risks becoming performative rather than transformative. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, meaningful shifts in practice occur through ako-centred wānanga, where learning is reciprocal, relational, and grounded in Māori epistemologies.

Within these spaces, kaiako engage in collaborative, dialogic, and critically reflective learning that enables them to examine their assumptions, values, and positionality within the education system. This process supports both the development of bicultural competence and the unlearning of deficit-based thinking. Partnerships with iwi and local Māori communities further strengthen this learning by anchoring professional development in place-based knowledge, lived experience, and local aspirations. In doing so, professional growth becomes responsive, contextualised, and aligned with the needs of tamariki and their whānau.

For these approaches to be sustained, systemic commitment is essential. Schools and leadership teams must prioritise time, resourcing, and relational space for collective inquiry, including opportunities such as noho marae, wānanga, and co-teaching alongside Māori specialists. These contexts foster deeper relational understanding, strengthen cultural capability, and promote shared responsibility for the integration of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga within everyday practice.

Such approaches align with the aspirations of Te Hurihanganui and Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia (Ministry of Education, 2021), which emphasise professional learning that is empowering, relational, and sustained over time. By embedding ongoing wānanga and iwi collaboration into professional learning frameworks, schools can move beyond token inclusion toward the enactment of mana ōrite—where Māori and Western knowledge systems are valued equally. In this way, culturally responsive pedagogy shifts from being an initiative to a way of being within the education system. When supported through sustained, relational, and contextually grounded professional learning, kaiako are better positioned to enact practices that uphold Māori values, strengthen identity, and contribute to equitable outcomes for all learners.

#### ***5.4.2 For Leadership and Schools***

Leadership emerges as a critical enabler of culturally responsive transformation within schools. From a Kaupapa Māori perspective, the extent to which te ao Māori is authentically embedded within school culture is shaped by leadership commitment, modelling, and strategic direction. Principals who actively demonstrate values such as manaakitanga and kotahitanga establish the relational foundation upon which culturally responsive practice can be sustained and normalised.

When leaders consistently enact these values through their interactions, decision-making, and organisational practices, they signal that te ao Māori is not an optional addition, but a guiding framework for the school. In this way, leadership influences culture not through compliance or mandate, but through relational modelling that prioritises humility, care, and collective responsibility. This aligns with Bishop et al. (2014) and Macfarlane (2015), who argue that relational leadership creates the conditions for equity by humanising school environments and fostering shared accountability.

In contrast, inconsistent or performative engagement with Māori values undermines the sustainability of culturally responsive practice. Where leadership support is superficial or unreliable, efforts to embed culturally responsive approaches remain fragmented and dependent on individual kaiako, limiting their long-term impact. This highlights that meaningful change requires leadership that is both committed and coherent in its approach.

Establishing authentic whanaungatanga within schools therefore requires deliberate and systemic action. Embedding Kaupapa Māori principles within policy, induction processes, and appraisal systems ensures that cultural responsiveness becomes a collective expectation rather than an individual choice. Such alignment reinforces shared responsibility across the school and supports the integration of culturally responsive practice into everyday operations. This approach also reflects May and Hill's (2020) emphasis on the normalisation of language and culture, where Māori ways of being are enacted consistently rather than acknowledged symbolically. Through sustained, values-driven leadership, schools are better positioned to move beyond performative inclusion toward genuine cultural transformation, creating environments where Māori knowledge, language, and identity are embedded within the fabric of schooling.

#### ***5.4.3 For Policy and System***

At a policy level, the findings emphasise the need for a system-wide commitment to achieving Māori educational success as Māori (Ministry of Education, 2021). This requires more than aspirational statements; it demands coherent and sustained action that is consistently enacted across all levels of the education system, from national policy to school leadership and classroom practice. Culturally responsive pedagogy must be formally recognised and supported through teacher standards, leadership development, and targeted resourcing.

When cultural competence and relational practice are positioned as essential professional capabilities rather than optional additions, kaiako are better supported to create learning environments that authentically reflect and uphold Māori worldviews. This requires education systems to recognise mātauranga Māori as integral to the curriculum and to the broader purposes of education, rather than treating it as supplementary or peripheral.

As Durie (2019) argues, a genuine Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership must extend beyond symbolic acknowledgement to encompass shared authority and co-governance between Māori and the Crown. Enacting this vision requires clear accountability mechanisms and sustained investment across all levels of the system. While policy frameworks such as Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia provide strong strategic direction, their effectiveness depends on the consistency and integrity of their implementation within curriculum design, assessment practices, and school governance. Achieving this level of alignment involves increasing Māori representation within decision-making roles, embedding te ao Māori perspectives within evaluation and quality assurance systems, and ensuring that professional learning opportunities are grounded in Kaupapa Māori principles. Such shifts move beyond symbolic inclusion toward structural transformation, where Māori knowledge, language, and values are embedded within the foundations of the education system.

When policy commitments are sustained, coherent, and accountable, equity becomes an everyday experience rather than an aspirational goal. In this way, system-level transformation plays a critical role in enabling culturally responsive practice to be realised consistently, supporting the ongoing pursuit of Māori educational success as Māori.

### **5.5 Summary**

Interpreted through a Kaupapa Māori lens, these findings reinforce that culturally responsive practice extends beyond technical strategies, instead reflecting a deeply relational and values-driven approach aligned with principles such as whanaungatanga and manaakitanga. Whanaungatanga emerged as the ethical foundation of pedagogy, while the normalisation of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga was shown to sustain cultural identity and belonging within everyday classroom practice. The analysis further highlighted how student agency reflects the enactment of tino rangatiratanga, and how reflective practice enables kaiako to navigate the ongoing tensions between their aspirations and the constraints of mainstream schooling.

Across the themes, the findings emphasise that meaningful transformation is rooted in relationships — with ākongā, whānau, colleagues, and with one’s own cultural positioning. Through these relational commitments, kaiako create learning environments in which Māori identities are affirmed, visible, and embedded within daily practice. The consistent use of te

reo Māori also emerges as a critical driver of cultural revitalisation, supporting the restoration of mauri and strengthening a sense of belonging. At the same time, this discussion has highlighted the systemic challenges that continue to shape practice, including inconsistent leadership, policy gaps, and limited resourcing. These constraints reinforce that culturally responsive pedagogy cannot be sustained through individual commitment alone. Instead, meaningful and enduring change requires alignment across leadership, policy, and system structures, grounded in the principles and obligations of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Overall, this chapter affirms that culturally responsive pedagogy is not a set of strategies, but a kaupapa-driven, values-based orientation to teaching and learning. When supported through coherent leadership and system-wide commitment, kaiako are better positioned to enact practices that uphold Māori success as Māori and contribute to the ongoing development of a genuinely bicultural education system in Aotearoa.

## **CHAPTER 6- KUPU WHAKAKAPI: CONCLUSION**

This kaupapa set out to examine how kaiako in mainstream primary school settings in Aotearoa understand and embody culturally responsive teaching, and what their lived experiences reveal about practice within these contexts. Across the interviews, literature, and grounding in Kaupapa Māori theory, a clear pūrākau emerges: culturally responsive teaching is most impactful when it is relational and grounded in a Te Ao Māori lens, embedded within the everyday practices of kaiako rather than confined to symbolic or performative gestures. The findings show that when kaiako actively prioritise whanaungatanga, uphold the mana of mātauranga Māori, and create meaningful opportunities for learner agency, they contribute to culturally sustaining learning environments that honour the intent of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and uplift the mauri of all ākonga.

The literature engaged within this kaupapa affirms that culturally responsive teaching is grounded in sociocultural, critical, and Kaupapa Māori theories, which position tuakiritanga, whanaungatanga, and mana motuhake as central to meaningful learning. These principles were clearly reflected in the practices described by participants, who intentionally embedded tikanga, te reo Māori, and culturally grounded routines into their classrooms. In doing so, they fostered environments where ākonga experienced belonging, confidence, and affirmation of identity. The findings reinforce that culturally responsive teaching is not defined by a fixed set of strategies, but by an ongoing relational commitment — a practice of reflection, adaptation, and genuine partnership with ākonga and their whānau.

This research contributes new knowledge by demonstrating that, within mainstream primary settings, culturally responsive practice is most effectively enacted as a relational and values-driven approach embedded in everyday teaching, rather than as a set of discrete strategies. It highlights how kaiako draw on their own critical reflection, cultural awareness, and relational positioning to navigate the complexities of this work in real and dynamic ways. Importantly, this kaupapa offers insight into how culturally responsive practice can be sustained within kura through collective commitment, shared values, and environments that enable te ao Māori to be meaningfully woven into daily teaching and learning.

Ultimately, this kaupapa affirms that Māori success as Māori is strengthened when kaiako and kura centre relational, linguistic, and cultural practices in ways that are consistent,

authentic, and lived. It positions kaiako not simply as implementers of practice, but as active agents of change who shape learning environments through their values, relationships, and everyday decisions. Through this, the research offers a vision of an Aotearoa where all ākonga are supported to learn, lead, and flourish as their true selves, grounded in identity, culture, and belonging.

## **RĀRANGI TOHUTORO: REFERENCE LIST**

- Banks, J. A. (2001). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching* (4th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Banks, J. A., & Banks, C. A. M. (2010). *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives* (7th ed.). Wiley.
- Berger, R. (2015). *Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research*. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234.
- Berryman, M., Eley, E., & Copeland, D. (2017). *Listening to culture: Māori students' insights about teacher practice in New Zealand schools*. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2017(1), 9–16.
- Berryman, M., Lawrence, D., & Lamont, R. (2018). *Cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy: A bicultural mana ōrite perspective*. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2018(1), 3–10.
- Bishop, R. (2019). *Teaching to the north-east: Relationship-based learning in practice*. NZCER Press.
- Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2006). *Culture speaks: Cultural relationships and classroom learning*. Huia.
- Bishop, R., & Berryman, M. (2009). *The Te Kotahitanga effective teaching profile*. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2, 27–34. <https://doi.org/10.18296/set.0461>
- Bishop, R., Berryman, M., Tiakiwai, S., & Richardson, C. (2003). *Te Kotahitanga: The experiences of Year 9 and 10 Māori students in mainstream classrooms*. Ministry of Education.
- Bishop, R., & Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. Dunmore Press.

- Bishop, R., Ladwig, J., & Berryman, M. (2014). *The centrality of relationships for pedagogy: The whanaungatanga thesis*. *American Educational Research Journal*, 51(1), 184–214.
- Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Cram, F. (2009). *Maintaining Indigenous voices*. *AlterNative*, 5(1), 62–71.
- Cram, F. (2018). *Kaupapa Māori evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand*. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 2018(159), 63–77.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Durie, M. (1998). *Whaiora: Māori health development* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Durie, M. (2001). *Ngā kāhui pou: Launching Māori futures*. Huia.
- Durie, M. (2019). *Te Tiriti-based futures: Emerging directions in education*. In E. A. McKinley & L. T. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous education* (pp. 1–18). Springer.
- The Education Hub. (2022). *Culturally responsive pedagogy in early childhood education*. <https://theeducationhub.org.nz>
- Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Farnan-Sestito, C. J. (2024). *Equal status for mātauranga Māori in NCEA: Perceptions of non-Māori teachers* (Master's thesis, Massey University).
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder & Herder.

- Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Haitana, T., Pitama, S., Cormack, D., Clarke, M., & Lacey, C. (2020). *The transformative potential of Kaupapa Māori research and Indigenous methodologies*. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920953752>
- Henare, M. (2001). *Tapu, mana, mauri, hau, wairua: A Māori philosophy of vitalism and cosmos*. In *Indigenous traditions and ecology* (pp. 197–221). Harvard University Press.
- Hond, R. (2013). *Matua te reo, matua te tangata: Speaker community – visions, approaches, outcomes* (Doctoral thesis, Massey University).
- Howard, T. C. (2003). Culturally relevant pedagogy: Ingredients for critical teacher reflection. *Theory Into Practice*, 42(3), 195-202.  
[https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4203\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4203_5)
- Hudson, M., Milne, M., Reynolds, P., Russell, K., & Smith, B. (2010). *Te Ara Tika: Guidelines for Māori research ethics*. Health Research Council of New Zealand.
- Kovach, M. (2010). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). *Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy*. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Macfarlane, A. H. (2004). *Kia hiwa rā! Listen to culture: Māori students' plea to educators*. NZCER Press.
- Macfarlane, A. H. (2015). *Hikairo rationale: Teaching and learning in a bicultural context*. NZCER Press.

- Macfarlane, A., Glynn, T., Cavanagh, T., & Bateman, S. (2007). *Creating culturally safe schools for Māori students*. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36, 65–76.
- May, S., & Hill, R. (2020). *Māori-medium education: Current issues and challenges* (2nd ed.). NZCER Press.
- Ministry of Education. (2011). *Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners*. <https://teachingcouncil.nz/assets/Files/Code-and-Standards/Tataiako.pdf>
- Ministry of Education. (2013). *Ka Hikitia—Accelerating success 2013–2017*.
- Ministry of Education. (2021a). *Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia: The Māori education strategy*.
- Ministry of Education. (2021b). *Te Hurihanganui: A blueprint for transforming education*.
- Nieto, S., & Bode, P. (2008). *Affirming diversity: The sociopolitical context of multicultural education* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- Orange, C. (2011). *The Treaty of Waitangi* (2nd ed.). Bridget Williams Books.
- Paris, D. (2012). *Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice*. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93-97.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X12441244>
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: Teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Pihama, L. (2010). *Kaupapa Māori theory: Transformative research and Indigenous social justice*. In J. Hutchings & J. Lee-Morgan (Eds.), *Decolonisation in Aotearoa* (pp. 7–20). NZCER Press.
- Pihama, L., Tiakiwai, S.-J., & Southey, K. (2015). *Kaupapa rangahau: A reader in Māori research methodology* (2nd ed.). University of Waikato.

- Pihama, L., Skipper, H., & Taipari, S. (2019). *He māta ora: Reflective practices through aroha ki te tangata*. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 54(1), 21–38.
- Santoro, N. (2009). *Teaching in culturally diverse contexts: What knowledge about “self” and “others” do teachers need?* *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 35(1), 33–45.
- Savage, C., Macfarlane, A., Macfarlane, S., Fickel, L., & Trinick, T. (2011). *Culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom*. *Set: Research Information for Teachers*, 2, 49–57.
- Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. Basic Books.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2012). *Confronting the marginalization of culturally responsive pedagogy*. *Urban Education*, 47(3), 562–584.
- Smith, G. H. (1997). *The development of Kaupapa Māori: Theory and praxis* (Doctoral thesis, University of Auckland).
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand. (2017). *Our code, our standards*. <https://teachingcouncil.nz>
- Timperley, H. (2011). *Realizing the power of professional learning*. McGraw-Hill.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Walker, R. (2016). *Striding out: Māori education*. In V. M. Carpenter & S. Osborne (Eds.), *Twelve thousand hours* (pp. 25–38). Dunmore.

## NGĀ ĀPITIHANGA: APPENDICES

### *Appendix A: Letter to Principals*



**Dear Tumuaki/Principal,**

Ko Jordyn Hasson ahau. I am currently studying towards my Master of Education (Māori Education) at Massey University's Institute of Education. I am writing to request that the 'Information Sheet' attached is forwarded onto the teachers at your school. I am inviting primary teachers to be a part of my research project which seeks to explore how mainstream primary school teachers understand, demonstrate, and embed cultural responsiveness within their teaching practice.

Teachers will have the opportunity to share their valuable insights, experiences, and reflections on how they support ākonga Māori and incorporate Te Ao Māori perspectives into their teaching pedagogy.

Participation will involve a one-on-one interview (approximately 45–60 minutes) at a time and place that suits the participant. Participation is entirely voluntary, and all data will be kept confidential and anonymised. Teachers will be fully informed of the purpose of the study and will have the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

I would be grateful if you could share the 'Information Sheet' with teachers at your school who may be interested in contributing to this important kaupapa. Their voices will help inform ways we can continue to grow culturally responsive practices in mainstream education.

If you or your kaimahi have any questions, or if you would like further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jordynhasson@gmail.com](mailto:jordynhasson@gmail.com).

Thank you for your assistance.

Nāku noa, nā,

**Jordyn Hasson**

*Appendix B: Prospective Participant Information Sheet*



***Cultivating Te Ao Māori in Mainstream School Environments: Empowering Cultural Responsiveness***

**PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Tēnā koe,

My name is Jordyn Hasson and I am a current Masters of Education (MEd) tauira (student) at Massey University (Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa). I would like to invite you to participate in my study. This research study aims to understand how mainstream teachers demonstrate cultural responsiveness in their teaching practice.

***What is the purpose of this research?***

This research explores how teachers understand and implement culturally responsive teaching in mainstream primary school settings, with a focus on Māori learners. This research study will draw on knowledge and experiences of primary school teachers around being culturally responsive in their teaching practice/pedagogy. I want to be able to learn from a range of teachers about what it means to be culturally responsive, and to identify barriers/challenges/implications mainstream teachers face 'on the ground'.

***If you participate, what will you need to do?***

This will involve participating in an interview for approximately 1 hour. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions about your understandings and experiences of cultural responsiveness. Each interview will take place where you will be most comfortable (eg: classroom, zoom/teams, or public place). Each interview will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will only be listened to by the researcher.

***Participant Rights***

If you decide to participate in this research study, you have the right to withdraw up until data analysis begins. If you feel that the questions being asked do not align with your teaching practice, you have the right to decline to answer. You may ask any questions at any time through your participation in this research (including before and after the interview). You understand that your name will not be used in any findings and your anonymity is guaranteed.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please email [REDACTED].

***The supervisors for my project are:***

**Dr Timu-o-te-rangi Niwa**

First Supervisor

Senior Lecturer - Teacher Education

Email: T.Niwa@massey.ac.nz

**Professor Huia Jahnke**

Second Supervisor

Professor of Māori and Indigenous Education

Email: H.T.Jahnke@massey.ac.nz

Nāku noa, nā



---

**Jordyn Hasson**

Master of Education Student, Massey University

***This research project was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee to ensure it meets ethical standards for research involving human participants***  
***Massey University Human Ethics Committee Approval. Project Number: 40000299***

*Appendix C: Participant Consent Form*



***Cultivating Te Ao Māori in Mainstream School Environments: Empowering Cultural Responsiveness***

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

I have read the information sheet and understand the purpose of the study. I agree to participate under the following conditions:

- I voluntarily consent to participate in the interview.
- I understand the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
- I understand I can decline to answer any question.
- I understand I can withdraw until data analysis begins.
- I know my identity will be kept confidential.
- I understand that data will be securely stored in a password-protected device and destroyed after five years.
- I understand that my name will be protected through pseudonyms and the removal of any identifying details.

Participant Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_