

Submission to United Nations - Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Introduction

1. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the action plan being developed by the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. This is a joint submission from Te Akatea and the Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand.

About Te Akatea

2. Te Akatea is the New Zealand Māori Principals Association. It grew from the work of Pem Bird and Punohu McCausland from 1989 - 1991, when Māori -medium education was growing quickly and the education landscape was changing rapidly under Tomorrow's Schools.
3. Punohu McCausland and Pem Bird convened two hui to explore the kaupapa of a national body for tumuaki. The group expressed a strong desire to whakawhanaunga and whakakotahi tumuaki who were using te reo Māori in kura as the language of teaching and learning. The group agreed that this body be formed, and that it be called Te Akatea. Te Akatea references the story of a founding group member's tipuna Rangitihī, who used akatea vine to bind a head wound during battle, enabling him to continue to fight and win the day.
4. Te Akatea continues today, representing Māori principals from early childhood, primary and secondary settings and speaking on all Māori education issues.

About the Teaching Council

5. The Teaching Council is the independent professional body for registered teachers from early childhood education through to primary and secondary schooling in English and Māori medium. There are currently around 131,000 registered teachers in New Zealand. The statutory purpose of the Council, set out in section 377 of the Education Act 1989 (the Act), is "to ensure safe and high-quality leadership, teaching and learning ... through raising the status of the profession".
6. The Council acts in the interests of registered teachers to:
 - enable and support leadership to teachers and direction for the profession
 - establish and maintain criteria for teacher registration, standards for ongoing practice and criteria for the issue of practising certificates
 - monitor and maintain the requirements relating to teacher conduct, competence and impairment
 - establish and maintain the Code of Professional Responsibility for teachers



What is needed: indigenous rights in education

7. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is Aotearoa New Zealand's founding document. Signed by the British Crown and Māori in 1840, it recognises collective rights of Māori as tangata whenua and the promise of the Crown to protect Māori language and culture. In education, this translates to a responsibility to ensure that the culture and identity of every Māori learner is upheld, valued and supported.
8. The major challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand's education system is ensuring that every part of the system embraces the responsibilities of Te Tiriti. This requires every person in each organisation within the system to have deep awareness of Te Tiriti principles. In particular, it requires Māori to be full partners in decision-making within organisations, and not just advisers.
9. At the level of individual teachers and kaiako, it is critical that every member of the profession actively values and promotes the culture and identity of their Māori students. Evidence shows that the rights and protections guaranteed under Te Tiriti are not fully realised in education, with tamariki Māori reporting that they experience racism in their education. This is unacceptable. There is a clear role for the Teaching Council to support the profession to uphold Māori cultural identity and language.

Emerging areas of good practice

10. Te Akatea appreciate the drive and commitment of the Council to uphold Māori culture and identity, and note that in some respects, the Council is at the forefront of the drive to improve cultural competency. Areas of good practice include:
 - Ngā Tikanga Matatika mō te Haepapa Ngaiotanga me ngā Paerewa mō te Umanga Whakaakoranga | the Code of Professional Responsibility and Standards for the Teaching Profession: the Code and Standards are foundational documents and define teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand. Te Tiriti o Waitangi is woven throughout the Code and Standards, which apply to all certificated teachers and provide a public statement of the principles which guide the profession.
 - Initial teacher education: new requirements for initial teacher education programmes make it mandatory to assess a student teacher's te reo Māori competency at or near entry to the programme.
 - Registration and certification: the Council is finalising proposals to make commitment te reo me ngā tikanga Māori a requirement to become a registered teacher, to be issued with and to renew a practising certificate.
 - Te Rautaki Tiriti o Waitangi: the Council launched Te Rautaki Tiriti o Waitangi, its Tiriti Strategy, in February 2019. The purpose of the Strategy is to realise the mana of Te Tiriti i in all that the Council does. To enable this the Council is undertaking a broad range of activities, including staff te reo capability to deliver a fully bilingual service to the profession.
11. The Council is also working with the Human Rights Commission on the Give Nothing to Racism project. Give Nothing to Racism will support the teaching profession to have safe, productive conversations about racism through the lens of the Code and Standards. The project will deliver practical tools and resources for teachers that are strengths based, future focused and optimistic.



Further work to be done

12. To ensure that the identity and culture of all Māori students is valued, the profession ultimately needs to be culturally sustaining and strengthening. That is, every member of the profession is competent, every member continually grows their competency, and every member instils their knowledge in the next generation through their teaching practice. This needs to be a focus area for the Council. The Code and Standards, initial teacher education requirements and registration policy provide a good platform on which to start this work.
13. Whānau are a critical part of the education system. This needs better recognition and support, particularly when tamariki are experiencing racism at school. This could take the form of a national support and guidance facility for whānau, for example a hotline. It could extend to additional moderation support between the school and the whānau if required. This may not sit with the Teaching Council, but the Council should play a part.

Recommendations for the National Action Plan

14. In the National Action Plan, we would like to see:
 - Explicit acknowledgement of the fact that racism is a societal problem and a reality for our tangata whenua, with corresponding actions for change.
 - Recognition of Te Tiriti as our founding document and actions to ensure Māori are full partners in decision-making, and not just advisers.
 - Acknowledgement of whānau, hapū and iwi as a critical part of our system and actions to realise this within our national systems and services.

Continuing the conversation

We are very pleased to begin this conversation with you. We would welcome further opportunities to contribute to New Zealand's action plan for the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

Myles Ferris
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Kuputaka | Glossary of Māori words

hui - gathering, meeting

kaiako - teacher

kaupapa - a set of values, principles and plans agreed on as a foundation for action

kura - school

tamariki - children

tangata whenua - indigenous people

te reo Māori - the Māori language

tikanga Māori - Māori cultural guidelines and behaviour, handed down through generations

tipuna - ancestor

tumuaki - principal

whakawhanaunga - to get to know, have a relationship

whakakotahi - to unify, unite

whānau - family, including extended family group

