



## TEACHING AND LEARNING TE REO MĀORI IN ENGLISH-MEDIUM SCHOOLS IN NEW ZEALAND:

### What we learned

# Benefits

*An important first step to implementing a successful Māori language programme in a school is to develop a sound rationale.*

The curriculum guidelines for teaching and learning Māori language in English-medium schools (Years 1–13)<sup>1</sup> provide an evidence base by describing the wide range of benefits that come from learning te reo Māori. They outline how te reo Māori enables students to explore shared values and develop key competencies.

There are many compelling reasons why teaching and learning Māori language in New Zealand schools is good for everyone. When teachers and school leaders understand and can articulate the reasons, they are in a better position to communicate to parents and students about the value that is gained from learning te reo Māori. Also, importantly, they are equipped with sound evidence to counter any challenges that can become barriers to the teaching and learning of the language.

## Developing a sense of nationhood and cultural identity

Recognising that Māori language is a taonga under the Treaty of Waitangi, and an official language of our country, is a great start. Students are becoming more aware of the role played by the indigenous language and culture in defining our point of difference in the world. Māori language has the power to build a sense of cultural identity in Māori students and to instill a sense of national identity in non-Māori. "All who learn te reo Māori help to secure its future as a living, dynamic and rich language. As they learn, they come to appreciate that diversity is a key to unity."<sup>2</sup>

Such understanding can lead students to think more deeply about their cultural identity and their personal place in the world with a view to becoming global as well as New Zealand citizens. Learning te reo Māori can promote empathy among students by giving them an understanding of someone else's culture and language. In the process, students start to ask questions and challenge their own beliefs and values.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education (2009). *Te Aho Arataki Marau mō te Ako i Te Reo Māori – Kura Auraki. Curriculum Guidelines for Teaching and Learning Te Reo Māori in English Medium Schools: Years 1–13*. Wellington: Learning Media (pp 10, 15–16).

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media (p14).

## Cognitive advantages

The New Zealand Curriculum explains that "... understanding te reo Māori stretches learners cognitively, enabling them to think in different ways".<sup>3</sup> The Māori language curriculum guidelines draw on studies that show bilingual students excelling over their monolingual peers. For example, bilingual students tend to be more creative and better at solving complex problems and they tend to score higher in verbal and non-verbal tests.

Further, while language learning per se brings cultural, social, cognitive, linguistic, economic and personal benefits for students, there are some specific additional advantages to be gained from learning te reo Māori. Students become more reflective as they compare what they know in their first language with what they are learning in te reo Māori. Importantly, they grow as learners – learning how to learn and discovering different ways of learning and knowing.<sup>4</sup>

## Employment opportunities

A common misconception is that there is no economic advantage to learning te reo Māori. However, the status of te reo Māori as an official language has meant that since 1987 New Zealand citizens have had the right to conduct their dealings with government agencies in te reo Māori. Since that time also, knowledge of te reo Māori has increasingly become a desirable skill in the world of business, law, trade, science, tourism, education, and politics. Consequently, many employers, including national and local government agencies, businesses, and courts of law, have more actively recruited employees who offer Māori language proficiency. This drive will only get stronger as our understanding increases of the unique value that te reo Māori offers. To have Māori language skills has become an appreciated point of difference and can be a defining quality in a competitive employment market.

## Māori enjoying success as Māori

Students are not the only ones to benefit from Māori language programmes in schools – students' success is success for their whānau. Where the te reo Māori programme in a school engages whānau, they are enabled to support each other to make a real contribution to the revitalisation of te reo Māori in ways that they may not feel may be possible alone.

Finally, and very importantly, the normalisation of te reo Māori in the classroom helps Māori students to become more engaged in their learning.<sup>5</sup> To this end, the teaching and learning of Māori language can remediate some of the systemic inequities that define our schools and wider society.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education (2009). Already cited (p14).

<sup>5</sup> Barback J. The big debate: should te Reo be compulsory in our schools? *Education Review*, April 9, 2017.

'Kia ita!'

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## Reflect

*Does your school have a shared understanding about the benefits of teaching and learning te reo Māori?*