

The expression of the bicultural relationship in Aotearoa New Zealand school curricula

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Harley Simanu

Acknowledgements

I begin by paying homage to both my Māori and Pākehā ancestors—ngā tūpuna—who have each, in their way, shaped the person I am today. Your strength, resilience, and legacy live on in me, and I carry your stories with deep pride and reverence.

To my supervisor, Dr Megan Lourie—thank you for your unwavering support, your belief in me, and for never giving up, even when I doubted myself. Your guidance has nurtured me through this journey, and for that, I am forever grateful.

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Nui te aroha.

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how the relationship between Māori and non-Māori, as established by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, is expressed within three contemporary curriculum policy documents: the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022), and Te Mātaiaho (2023). Document analysis was employed to examine the three curricula, focusing on who is considered to be part of the relationship, the language and terminology relating to the relationship, and how the relationship itself is expressed. The main finding of the research is that while each document reflects a commitment to biculturalism, the bicultural relationship is expressed in slightly different ways. This lack of consistency may contribute to the ongoing challenge educators face in understanding and enacting biculturalism in educational settings. Ultimately, this research reaffirms the need for ongoing reflection, dialogue, and collaboration to ensure that the curriculum not only reflects Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments in theory but also supports their realisation in practice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I te taha o tōku māmā
Ko Taupiri me Taranaki ōku maunga
Ko Waikato me Waingongoro ōku awa
Ko Tainui me Aotea ōku waka
Ko Waikato-Tainui me Ngāti Ruanui ōku iwi
Ko Ngaati Aamaru me Araukūku ōku hapu
Ko Te Awamaarahi me Ngārongo ōku marae

I te taha o tōku pāpā
Ko Taylor tōku ingoa whānau
He Tangata Tiriti ahau

“Inā kei te mohio koe ko wai koe, I anga mai koe i hea, kei te mohio koe, kei te anga atu ki hea. If you know who you are and where you are from, then you will know where you are going”.

My journey in education has been a continually evolving process, shaped by the diverse contexts and experiences I've encountered along the way. Over time, I've come to understand that education is far more than the simple transmission of knowledge. It is a dynamic and reciprocal process—an intricate interplay between teaching and learning that is deeply interconnected with the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it occurs.

In undertaking this research in the field of education, I draw from my multifaceted experiences as a Māori māmā involved in kōhanga reo, a former board trustee member at a mainstream kura, a student representative on the board of studies at a tertiary institution, and experiencing the work of a kaiako through my student practicum placement. These roles have allowed me to see education from various perspectives and have profoundly shaped my view on the importance of culturally responsive pedagogies and frameworks. Through these experiences, I've become particularly interested in exploring what an authentic bicultural Tiriti-informed relationship in education could look like. While there has been some shift in language to terms like Tiriti-based or Tiriti-informed relationships, for the sake of clarity and consistency, I am going to use the term 'bicultural relationship'.

Acknowledgement of a bicultural relationship, established by the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, has been part of the education policy landscape in Aotearoa, New Zealand, since the 1990s (Lourie, 2015). More recently, the Education and Training Act 2020 legislated that school boards were to ‘give effect to the Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including by “working to ensure that its plans, policies, and local curriculum reflect local tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori, and te ao Māori”. However, doing this is not an easy task for boards, schools, or teachers. I have experienced attempts to enact this bicultural relationship in different education settings, which have been complex and, at times, quite perplexing. Two key factors may have fuelled this complexity. First, there appears to be a lack of consensus and a clear, shared understanding of what it means to be bicultural or Treaty-informed, especially among educators. This lack of clarity poses challenges in creating a unified approach to teaching and learning that is responsive to both Māori and non-Māori needs and perspectives. Second, I’ve observed that both individuals and groups within the educational sector often struggle with the practical implications of this relationship. There's confusion around expectations—what is required, how to enact those requirements, and the implications for curriculum development, teaching practices, and student outcomes. I began to wonder if the way ideas about biculturalism are expressed in curriculum documents might contribute to this confusion.

Although bicultural education policies have existed since the 1980s, the concept of biculturalism has evolved significantly over time. Durie (1998) introduced the idea of a continuum with a range of goals and structural arrangements along which different ideas about biculturalism could be located. The evolution of the term through educational practice and policy has been traced by Lourie (2015), and I draw on her work to provide a brief overview as context for this study. An overview of biculturalism in education

In earlier educational history, biculturalism did not exist. Before the 1960s, state policies focused on cultural assimilation, with education being a primary tool. English was the sole language of instruction, and Māori language culture was largely excluded from schools. The Hunn Report marked a shift from assimilation to integration of Māori into society,

promoting a one-nation concept that still marginalised Māori culture. The bicultural goal in education at this time involved 'celebrating māoritanga', a form of biculturalism aimed at reducing discrimination and prejudice through mainstreaming Māori culture. Efforts to improve race relations by affirming Māori culture through education were made with initiatives such as Taha Māori in schools. However, these efforts were often seen as tokenistic and failed to gain significant traction. During the 1980s and 1990s, biculturalism as a concept was being discussed more generally in policy. Education policy encouraged greater emphasis on the inclusion of Māori culture and perspectives in mainstream schools. A later form of biculturalism, which emphasised partnership, appeared in policy in the 2000s (Lourie, 2015).

Research aim

The changing or evolving expression of biculturalism presents a challenge for anyone working in the education sector, especially those who are not New Zealand-born teachers, as well as teachers who may have developed their understanding of biculturalism some time ago and who may not have realised that understandings of biculturalism continue to change.

My research aims to identify how the relationship between Māori and non-Māori, as established by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, is expressed within three different curriculum documents: New Zealand Curriculum (NZC), NZ Histories and Te Mātaiaho (version 1). I will conduct a document analysis focusing on the way these curricula communicate ideas about this relationship. I am interested in finding out if the concept of biculturalism is starting to have a more stable meaning or if there are still differences in the way it is conceptualised and expressed that might contribute to the confusion among educators when they try to enact the ideas. The findings of this research may contribute to a broader conversation about what it means to collectively work together in an education system that authentically reflects and honours the Treaty relationship to provide all learners with an equitable, inclusive, and empowering educational experience. The question that my study aims to answer is 'how is the bicultural relationship established by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, expressed within three contemporary curriculum documents in Aotearoa NZ.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the research literature relating to bicultural relationships and the way they are expressed in education in Aotearoa New Zealand. I explored a body of literature that discusses the meaning of biculturalism and the changing terms to describe the groups in the relationship. I also reviewed a body of literature that looks at the meanings of biculturalism in education. Finally, I looked for studies that examined the expression of the bicultural relationship in education documents.

What does biculturalism mean?

In the New Zealand context, biculturalism embodies the idea of developing structures, procedures, and policies that reflect the partnership intended to be honoured under the Treaty of Waitangi, the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand, signed between many Māori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown in 1840 (Hindmarsh, 2000). Since the 1970s, there has been growing acknowledgement of the Treaty's political significance and the partnership it establishes between Māori and the Crown (Thorns et al., 2010). Recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi has been linked to a commitment to biculturalism, which reflects the social positioning of Māori (Thorns et al., 2010). Some scholars view biculturalism as Pākehā seeking ways to confront the racism and injustices that have oppressed Māori (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). The existence of two versions—the English-language Treaty of Waitangi and the Māori-language Tiriti o Waitangi—presents significant challenges for understanding biculturalism in Aotearoa, New Zealand, as the two texts do not align in meaning or intent. This discrepancy complicates efforts to define the nature of partnership and shared authority envisioned in a bicultural framework.

Elizabeth Rata (2005) critically examines biculturalism in Aotearoa, New Zealand, arguing that it functions not merely as a recognition of cultural difference but as a political ideology that has reshaped the governance structure. Initially rooted in the intention to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi by acknowledging the partnership between Māori and the Crown, biculturalism has, according to Rata (2005), evolved into a dual authority model that can privilege tribal elites and institutionalise ethnic identity. She contends that this model risks essentialising both Māori and Pākehā identities, potentially undermining democratic principles by conflating cultural

recognition with political power. Rata (2005) calls for reconsidering biculturalism in favour of a universalist approach, emphasising democratic equality over ethnic division. Her work invites critical reflection on the implications of bicultural policy in contemporary governance and public life.

In the early period of biculturalism, many commentators were attempting to map how it could be understood. Sharpe (in Durie, 1994) described two kinds of biculturalism: ‘bicultural reformism’ and ‘bicultural distributivism’. The first sees the adaptation of Pākehā institutions to meet Māori requirements, whilst the latter sees the development of Māori-specific institutions that share the authority under the Treaty. Building on this idea, Durie (1994) proposed that biculturalism could be viewed as a continuum of ‘bicultural goals’ and ‘structural arrangements’. Relating to ‘bicultural goals,’ at one end, the goal was the attainment of cultural skills and knowledge; at the other end, the desire for greater Māori independence, and in the middle, integration (Durie, 1994). Regarding ‘structural arrangements’, Durie (1994) developed a five-part diagram of the structure. According to Durie (1994), the initial stage represented an unmodified mainstream institution where anything Māori was viewed as an addition to the overall culture of the institution rather than as an integral part. An example of this is the Taha Māori component that was introduced into schools in the 1980s. The second stage involves a Māori perspective evolving within the institution. Bilingual units in schools serve as an example of this. The third stage argues that no single institution can effectively accommodate two distinct cultures simultaneously; therefore, it advocates for parallel institutions that strive for the same goal. Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori exemplify this principle. Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley (1999) expanded on Durie’s continuum by incorporating policy outcomes linked to various forms of biculturalism. The idea of a bicultural continuum can be useful for reflecting on the changes in thinking about biculturalism.

Evolving identity terms in Aotearoa, New Zealand

The meanings and understandings of the term biculturalism have changed over time, and so have the terms used to describe the groups in the bicultural relationship. Different terms such as Māori, Pākehā, non-Māori, tauwiwi, and tangata tiriti have been or are being used, reflecting broader socio-cultural transformations in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Todd (2005) argues that shifts in collective identity categories are often driven by political contestation, particularly in postcolonial contexts. The terms Māori, Pākehā, non-Māori, tauwiwi and tangata tiriti have

developed distinct connotations over time, influenced by the dynamics of colonisation, cultural recognition, and the pursuit of equity.

The term Māori, denoting the indigenous people of Aotearoa, has been central to identity discourses since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840. Its usage marks a distinction from non-indigenous populations and embodies a connection to whenua, whakapapa, and mātauranga Māori (Moeke-Pickering, 1996). However, the emergence of the term Māori as a collective identifier was largely shaped through colonisation, where a binary opposition between Māori and Pākehā was constructed to serve the colonial framework (Smith, 1999; Walker, 1990). While this categorisation enabled a pan-tribal political identity, particularly in the context of Treaty claims and Indigenous rights (Durie, 1998), it also risks flattening the diverse and rich identities of iwi, hapū, and whānau, each with their tikanga, reo, and histories (Barlow, 1991). In contemporary Aotearoa, Māori identity continues to evolve, reflecting both the legacy of colonisation and the ongoing assertion of tino rangatiratanga, with Māori themselves actively redefining what it means to be Māori in diverse urban and cultural contexts (Webber, 2008).

The term Pākehā traditionally refers to New Zealanders of European, primarily British, descent. In more recent scholarship, its significance has expanded beyond ethnic categorisation to include considerations of settler identity and positionality within a bicultural nation (Forsyth, 2018; Bidois, 2013). The term is frequently employed in analyses of Treaty partnerships and postcolonial relationships, often to encourage reflexivity among Pākehā regarding their historical and ongoing roles in colonisation (Warren, 2014; Pack et al., 2016). While some Pākehā have embraced the term as part of a bicultural identity, others express discomfort due to its associations with colonial privilege and accountability (Madden-Smith, 2021).

The broader categories, non-Māori and tauīwi, are frequently used in educational and socio-political discourse to describe all individuals who do not identify as Māori. These terms are often employed to highlight disparities between Māori and other populations, particularly within the education system (Came & Silva, 2011). However, critiques of these terms note their generalising effect, which can obscure the diverse cultural backgrounds encompassed within the non-Māori category and diminish the specificity offered by terms such as Pākehā or tangata tiriti.

The emergence of tangata tiriti—literally, “people of the Treaty”—has gained traction in both scholarly and public discourse as a more inclusive and relational term. It is increasingly used to describe those who, while not Māori, recognise and uphold the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi

(Bidois, 2013; Eley & Berryman, 2020). The term shifts the focus from ethnicity to Treaty-based responsibility, reflecting a growing emphasis on collaborative approaches to addressing historical grievances and advancing equity.

What does biculturalism mean in education?

Biculturalism in education in Aotearoa, New Zealand, is grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which establishes a partnership between Māori and the Crown. As Lourie (2015) observes, since the 1980s, references to biculturalism and the Treaty have become increasingly embedded and widely accepted within the education policy discourse. Biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand's education system has increasingly been shaped by legislative commitments to Te Tiriti O Waitangi. The Education Act 1989 marked a significant turning point, acknowledging the Crown's responsibility to uphold the principles of the Treaty in education. This Act laid the groundwork for recognising Māori as tangata whenua and emphasised the need to support Māori educational aspirations within the state system (Education Act, 1989).

Building on this foundation, the Education and Training Act 2020 provides a more explicit commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, reflecting the growing recognition of Māori rights and partnerships in education. The Act includes specific obligations for education agencies to give effect to the Treaty, including supporting Māori-medium education, incorporating tikanga and mātauranga Māori, and working in partnership with Māori communities (Education and Training Act, 2020).

The bicultural partnership underpins educational commitments to equity and cultural responsiveness, particularly concerning Māori learners. Biculturalism in education can refer to the recognition and inclusion of both Māori and non-Māori worldviews in teaching and learning. Gordon-Burns and Campbell (2014) define biculturalism as a deliberate effort to embed te reo Māori and tikanga Māori within curriculum and pedagogy, ensuring both cultures are visible and valued. Manna (2003, as cited in Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014) characterises biculturalism as an equitable partnership where Māori and Pākehā participate equally and share decision-making. Skerrett (2007, as cited in Gordon-Burns & Campbell, 2014) adds that biculturalism requires communities to uphold Māori cultural identity and support Māori learners to flourish as Māori. Stewart (2018) extends this conversation by arguing that biculturalism in education must move beyond tokenism and be reimaged as a critical, transformative process that challenges colonial structures and promotes genuine power-sharing between Māori and non-Māori.

The bicultural relationship as expressed in education documents

Lourie (2015) undertook a critical exploration of how biculturalism is represented in New Zealand education policy, aiming to understand how the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi are articulated and operationalised in curriculum documents. Her analysis revealed a pattern of ambiguity and inconsistency in how bicultural intentions are conveyed, often relying on vague or symbolic references to te reo Māori and tikanga Māori rather than substantive commitments to equitable partnership. Lourie (2015) concluded that while education policies may gesture toward biculturalism, they often fail to confront the deeper power dynamics inherent in colonial relationships. This raises important questions about how genuinely the education system supports Māori aspirations and self-determination.

Building on this analysis, Lourie (2018) further challenges educators and policymakers to reconsider the meaning of biculturalism beyond superficial inclusion. She argues that biculturalism should not be understood as a settled concept but rather as a site of ongoing negotiation and transformation. True bicultural practice, in her view, must involve actively questioning whose knowledge is privileged, how Māori voices are heard, and whether Māori perspectives are treated as equal rather than supplementary.

Similarly, Stewart (2018) critiques the tendency of educational institutions to treat biculturalism as a static or tokenistic obligation. She suggests that biculturalism in education must be “rebooted” to move beyond symbolic gestures toward a more engaged and critical approach that disrupts dominant Pākehā norms and centres Māori epistemologies. Stewart argues that education has a responsibility not just to acknowledge biculturalism, but to actively dismantle colonial logics and make space for transformative Māori-led pedagogies.

Skerrett (2018) reinforces these ideas through her work in early childhood education, where she explores how a “refreshed” bicultural curriculum might be enacted at the intersection of colonial histories, biocultural knowledge, and critical literacy. She advocates for pedagogical approaches that do more than incorporate Māori language and customs — instead, they must be grounded in a commitment to Māori sovereignty, cultural integrity, and critical reflection. Skerrett emphasises that educators must support Māori learners to thrive as Māori, and this involves both an ethical and political stance that resists assimilationist tendencies.

Together, these scholars illustrate that biculturalism in education, as expressed in official

documents, is often more aspirational than enacted. While the language of partnership, equity, and cultural inclusion is present, the lived reality within schools and classrooms may fall short. A genuine bicultural approach requires sustained commitment to Māori-led knowledge, power-sharing, and the decolonisation of educational practices and policies.

The research gap

The literature highlights that the terminology used to conceptualise and express biculturalism has continued to change, and this reflects broader historical and political shifts in Aotearoa, New Zealand. While these changes signal a growing awareness of the complexities of bicultural practice, there remains no universally accepted or clearly defined understanding of what biculturalism entails. There are very few studies that have looked at how the bicultural relationship is expressed in education documents. This research responds to that gap by examining how the bicultural relationship is expressed within three contemporary curriculum documents in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study aimed to investigate how the relationship between Māori and non-Māori, as established by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, has been expressed within three contemporary curriculum policy documents. Bowen's (2009) analytic procedure for document analysis was employed to examine three curriculum texts, enabling a critical appraisal of how this relationship has been articulated. This chapter outlines the methodological design of the study and provides the rationale for the selected qualitative approach.

Research Design

This research adopts document analysis as a qualitative research method (Bowen 2009). Document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted to gain meaning and understanding (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). This method recognises documents as socially situated artefacts, allows for the identification of meaning through language, context, and representation, and can help uncover patterns and themes over time (Bowen, 2009). There are several ways document analysis can be used in qualitative research, either in combination with other empirical data, such as interviews, or as a stand-alone method. Document analysis was employed as the sole method in this study, as it allowed for the systematic examination of shifts in language and expressions of biculturalism within recent curriculum documents (Bowen, 2009).

Using document analysis as a stand-alone method is appropriate for examining curriculum documents, as these texts are produced within specific socio-political contexts and reflect prevailing values, ideologies, and policy directions. Curriculum documents are not neutral; they have embedded assumptions about identity, knowledge, and power, making them rich sources for critical inquiry. As Bowen (2009) notes, document analysis is well suited to studies that aim to interpret meaning within texts and to identify shifts in discourse over time. In the context of this study, document analysis enabled a close examination of how biculturalism is constructed, prioritised, and communicated. This approach allowed the researcher to trace language changes, consider the consistency of bicultural commitments, and identify the implications for educational practice and equity.

Method

Document analysis includes finding, selecting, making sense of, and synthesising data contained in documents. Excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from documents are located and organised into categories using content analysis, then analysed using thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). These stages are described below.

Document Analysis

Document analysis begins with the selection of texts or documents. I purposefully selected three curriculum documents released in chronological order: The New Zealand Curriculum (2007), Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum Refresh (2022), and Te Mātaiaho (2023). Based on my experience in the education sector and my awareness of developments at the government level, I was aware of significant changes occurring in educational policy. To make the study manageable, I chose to concentrate specifically on curriculum documents because they are publicly available and are an influential site where educational values, priorities, and power dynamics are formalised. Initially, I had contemplated including Te Whāriki, Tātaiako, and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa because they include a range of Māori education perspectives and cultural frameworks. However, I ultimately selected the three aforementioned curricula because of their availability and their positioning within mainstream compulsory schooling.

2007 New Zealand Curriculum

The New Zealand Curriculum was officially published in November 2007 by the Ministry of Education. It is intended to provide a clear and coherent framework for teaching and learning in English-medium schools from Years 1 to 13, with a strong emphasis on key competencies, values, and a future-focused approach to education. The curriculum aims to foster confident, connected, actively involved, and lifelong learners while also recognising the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand by affirming the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Ministry of Education, 2007). The release of the New Zealand Curriculum occurred during the final year of the Labour-led government under Prime Minister Helen Clark, a period characterised by policy efforts to promote social inclusion, cultural diversity, and improved outcomes for Māori learners (Clark, 2007; McGee, 2013). The 2007 curriculum aligned with broader Third Way political ideologies, emphasising key competencies and values such as equity, participation, and respect for diversity (Thrupp & Irwin, 2010). These values reflected

a vision of education that supported active citizenship and lifelong learning in a pluralistic society (O'Neill, 2017). The political climate at the time reflected a growing public and institutional commitment to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, with increasing recognition of Māori rights and aspirations in policy discourse (Skerrett, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2008). However, critiques persisted regarding the superficial treatment of Te Tiriti in educational policy and practice, and the limited structural transformation of state systems such as education to genuinely reflect Tiriti-based partnerships (Mutu, 2019; Bishop et al., 2014).

2022 Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum

The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum was officially published in March 2022, following an extensive development and consultation process led by the Ministry of Education. It is intended to ensure that all ākonga in Years 1–10 learn about the histories of Aotearoa New Zealand, with a particular focus on the local and national impact of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, colonisation, and the enduring presence and contribution of Māori as tangata whenua (Ministry of Education, 2022). The curriculum aimed to address long-standing gaps and inconsistencies in the teaching of New Zealand history and to promote critical thinking, identity, and understanding of the nation's diverse past (MacIntyre et al., 2021).

The document is structured around three overarching big ideas, which emphasise the significance of Māori history as foundational, the continuous influence of the past on the present, and the importance of perspectives in shaping historical narratives (Ministry of Education, 2022). These big ideas are supported by key historical concepts such as causes and effects, continuity and change, and perspectives. The curriculum content is organised through a national framework with the flexibility to incorporate local contexts, encouraging schools to engage with mana whenua and reflect the unique histories of their regions (Harcourt & Sheehan, 2022). Te Tiriti o Waitangi is embedded as a central theme throughout the curriculum, highlighting its ongoing relevance and impact on society in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2022; Keenan, 2023).

2023 Te Mātaiaho The Refreshed New Zealand Curriculum

Te Mātaiaho: The Refreshed New Zealand Curriculum was released for feedback in March 2023. The refresh aimed to address the missing knowledge/content issue identified in the 2007 curriculum (Rozas, 2024). It was also a response to “the lack of attention paid to the value of Mātauranga Māori knowledge in the 2007 curriculum, despite the status of the Treaty of

Waitangi / Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the requirement for schools to ‘consult with Māori and ensure their plans, policies and local curriculum reflect local tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori’ (Aitken & Wood, 2023, p.3). The development of this version occurred under the Labour-led government. There were several drafts of Te Mātaiaho, the 2023 draft that was used in this study included a curriculum framework (called Te Mātaiaho) as well as subject curricula. I used the curriculum framework only for the analysis.

Content analysis

Content analysis is a systematic method of categorising information according to themes that correspond to the primary research question (Bowen, 2009). For the content analysis, each document was individually reviewed and converted into PDF format. This standardisation allowed the use of the search function (Ctrl+f) to efficiently identify keywords within the documents. The following keywords were selected based on their direct relevance to the research question: 'partnership', 'bicultural', Pākeha', 'Māori', 'tauiwi', 'tangata tiriti', 'treaty', 'tiriti', 'European' and 'non-Māori'. The keywords 'treaty' and 'tiriti' were searched separately because of the nature and existence of the two versions. The focus of selecting these particular keywords was to examine how the relationship was being expressed in the documents. I searched for keywords about the nature of the relationship (for example, partnership), the reason for the relationship (Tiriti o Waitangi) and who was in the relationship (a range of words that represent the 'groups'). To organise and compare the findings across documents, a table was created in Google Docs to systematically record the data. The table is split into four columns. The first column is for keywords, and the other three columns are used for each of the chosen documents (NZC, Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum and Te Mātaiaho). The specific number of search results for each keyword is documented along with carefully selected passages from the document as a means of understanding what the keyword meant in context. In places where the terms appeared many times in a similar way, I described the way it was being used. The table allowed for a clear comparison of how each curriculum document used the selected concepts.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis involves identifying patterns within the data, with the emerging themes serving as the basis for categorisation and analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006 in Bowen, 2009). The process requires a thorough and focused re-examination of the data, during which

the researcher engages in coding and the development of categories based on the characteristics of the data to identify themes relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Bowen, 2009). Using the comparison table created when doing the content analysis, I was able to see themes or patterns emerging, and these are presented in the findings chapter.

Positionality Statement

In conducting this research, I acknowledge my position as a researcher. My background, experiences, and perspectives may have influenced my interpretation of the data, particularly regarding the sensitive nature of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its implications for Māori in education. I approached this study with a commitment to reflexivity, recognising that my identity and experiences intersect with the research context and the perspectives represented in the documents analysed. To mitigate potential biases, I engaged in ongoing reflection throughout the research process, considering how my positionality may have shaped the analysis and conclusions drawn from the data. In addition, I engaged with academic literature that represented a range of different perspectives. By remaining attentive to the nuances of the discourses surrounding Te Tiriti o Waitangi, I aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the implications of these discourses for education policy and social justice.

Summary

In summary, this study adopted a qualitative research design with document analysis serving as the method of inquiry. Drawing on Bowen's (2009) framework, I examined three curriculum documents—The New Zealand Curriculum (2007), The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum Refresh (2022), and Te Mātaiaho (2023)—to trace how the relationship between Māori and non-Māori, as established by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, had been expressed over time. Documents were purposefully selected based on their chronological release and their relevance to mainstream compulsory education. The data was explored using content and thematic analysis.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings from my detailed document analysis of the selected curriculum documents. The first section presents data derived from content analysis, which involved systematically searching for key terms within the documents. These results are summarised in Table 1 below, which displays the keywords used, the frequency of their occurrences, and the specific sentences or phrases in which they appeared. Following this, the chapter moves into a thematic analysis, where I explore patterns and insights drawn from the initial content findings, providing a deeper interpretation of how these terms and concepts are represented across the curriculum documents.

Table 1

Content analysis of three curriculum documents

Keyword	NZC (2007)	Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022)	Te Mātaiaho (2023)
Partnership/s	<p>3 search results</p> <p>Page 6- Purpose and Scope “help schools give effect to the partnership that is at the core of our nation’s founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi”.</p> <p>2 of the 3 search results were ruled out as they did not pertain to the bicultural relationship referenced in the research question.</p>	<p>2 search results</p> <p>Page 20 - Year 7 & 8 Key knowledge “Also, prior to the Treaty, Māori were coming to believe in the special bond and a partnership of equal status between chiefs and the Crown. The missionaries did not discourage the idea that this partnership would continue with the signing of Te Tiriti”</p>	<p>6 search results</p> <p>Page 8- Tiriti O Waitangi “The key principles include rangatiratanga, partnership, participation, active protection, equity, and options.”</p> <p>Page 21- Essential pedagogies Rangapū mana taurite: Building power- sharing partnerships (this relates to ākongā, kaiako & whānau)</p> <p>Page 38- Mātaiaho (School Curriculum design and review Schools engage in an ongoing process using the national curriculum to design a rich and meaningful school curriculum with progress and pace at the heart of the design and in local partnerships with tangata whenua, ākongā, whānau, and the wider community</p> <p>Page 40-Mātaiahikā “...creates opportunities for learning based on mutually beneficial local partnerships with tangata whenua, whānau, and the wider community.”</p> <p>“Mutually beneficial partnerships with tangata whenua as kaitiaki of the local area (rohe), with whānau, and with the wider community foster connections...”</p>

<p>Bicultural</p>	<p>4 search results</p> <p>Page 9 - Principles “The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand. All students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga”.</p> <p>Page 18 - English “The study of New Zealand and world literature contributes to students’ developing sense of identity, their awareness of New Zealand’s bicultural heritage...”</p> <p>Page 20 - Arts “The arts are powerful forms of expression that recognise, value, and contribute to the unique bicultural and multicultural character of Aotearoa New Zealand....”</p> <p>Page 30 - Social Sciences “Students explore the unique bicultural nature of New Zealand society that derives from the Treaty of Waitangi.”</p>	<p>Zero search results</p>	<p>2 search results</p> <p>Page 32- Purpose statement for English: “Engaging with mātauranga Māori through the creation and interpretation of texts provides opportunities to strengthen knowledge and understanding of te ao Māori and Māori perspectives, and to play a part in shaping a bicultural Aotearoa.”</p> <p>Page 33- Overview “It places a particular focus on how texts help ākongā to think about their place in Aotearoa New Zealand and how they are helping shape a bicultural nation.”</p> <p>The term ‘bicultural’ is used as a descriptor in the document.</p>
<p>Pākehā</p>	<p>1 search result</p> <p>Page 8- Vision “who will work to create an Aotearoa New Zealand in which Māori and Pākehā recognise each other as full Treaty partners...”</p>	<p>13 search results</p> <p>Page 6- • the range of people present on 6 February 1840 – groups of Māori from throughout the north, missionaries, Pākehā settlers, women and children, and some notable public figures: Hōne Heke, Tāmāti Wāka Nene, Eruera Maihi Patuone, Iwikau Te Heuheu from Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Lieutenant Governor Hobson, James Busby, Henry and Edward Williams, William Colenso, and Bishop Pompallier</p> <p>Page 13- the range of views among rangatira Māori – some expressed strong reservations, including the possible effects of the Treaty on chiefly authority, land, and trade; some were supportive, seeing Te Tiriti as a means of curbing Pākehā lawlessness and of ensuring ongoing, mutually beneficial trading relationships</p> <p>Page 13- restrictions on representation and voting – the initial basis of property possession and individual title (as derived from British law), which privileged male Pākehā (Māori men and women still owned land, but communally rather than by individual title); the disproportionate allocation of Māori seats compared to Pākehā; the denial of the vote to women (based on British law); the exclusion of Chinese from</p>	<p>Zero search results</p>

		<p>voting until 1952</p> <p>Page 15- economic relationships between coastal iwi and early newcomers such as sealers, whalers, and traders – hapū began to engage more fully with new economic activities, due to a desire to access European trade goods and as an expression of manaakitanga; this in turn linked Māori into a globalising economy, with some joint ventures between Māori and Pākehā (e.g., whaling stations, and the shipyards at Hōreke).</p> <p>The major use of the term in the document is as a description.</p>	
Māori	<p>39 search results</p> <p>Page 8 - Vision “who will work to create an Aotearoa New Zealand in which Māori and Pākehā recognise each other as full Treaty partners...”</p> <p>Only 1 of the 39 search results was found related to the bicultural relationship.</p> <p>All the rest of the search results involved the term being used descriptively.</p>	<p>137 search results</p> <p>A lot of the results for the term are used descriptively. As in naming Māori as a people, a collective of their history.</p>	<p>65 search results</p> <p>The term is used in many contexts in the documents. It is used as a descriptive term for Māori as a people, along with their reo, tikanga & matauranga.</p>
Tangata Whenua	<p>2 search results</p> <p>Used as a descriptor in the document.</p>	<p>13 search results</p> <p>Page 1- Purpose statement “This includes understanding the mutual responsibilities to Te Tiriti o Waitangi The Treaty of Waitangi of tangata whenua and tauwiwi as they live together in relationships that promote respect for one another, tikanga, and the natural environment”.</p> <p>Page 4- “Māori are tangata whenua. They were the first people of this land and have stories about their origins and arrival”.</p> <p>Page 5- “Tangata whenua are deeply connected to the local area. Naming places was key to establishing and maintaining mana and tūrangawaewae”.</p> <p>Page 24- Māori as tangata whenua were excluded from these cultural ideals, which they experienced as colonising and assimilating.</p>	<p>24 search results</p> <p>Page 8- Te Tiriti O Waitangi “Te Tiriti and its principles (as articulated by the Courts and the Waitangi Tribunal) set out obligations for the Crown and Māori that guide how tangata Tiriti¹ and tangata whenua can live together with mutual respect”.</p> <p>Page 38- School Curriculum “Schools engage in an ongoing process using the national curriculum to design a rich and meaningful school curriculum with progress and pace at the heart of the design and in local partnerships with tangata whenua, ākonga, whānau, and the wider community”.</p> <p>Footnote on Page 38 to describe tangata whenua- “15 local people, hosts, Indigenous people, people born of the whenua (Te Aka Māori dictionary); often referred to as ‘mana whenua’”</p> <p>The majority of the context in which the term is used is to showcase the importance of knowing and understanding that Māori are the ‘tangata whenua’/people of the land in Aotearoa New Zealand.</p>

Tangata Tiriti	Zero search results	Zero search results	<p>2 search results</p> <p>Page 8 - Te Tiriti O Waitangi “Te Tiriti and its principles (as articulated by the Courts and the Waitangi Tribunal) set out obligations for the Crown and Māori that guide how tangata tiriti¹ and tangata whenua can live together with mutual respect.”</p> <p>The term tangata tiriti is used twice in the document. The first time it is mentioned on page 8, it has a superscript number with the definition of the term in the footer. It is used as a descriptor.</p>
Treaty	<p>8 search results</p> <p>Page 6 - Purpose & Scope “Together, the two documents will help schools give effect to the partnership that is at the core of our nation’s founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi.”</p> <p>Page 8 - Vision “...Aotearoa New Zealand in which Māori and Pākehā recognise each other as full Treaty partners...”</p> <p>Page 9 - Principles “The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi”</p> <p>Page 30 - Social Sciences “Students explore the unique bicultural nature of New Zealand society that derives from the Treaty of Waitangi.”</p> <p>The term treaty is dominant in this document. Little mention of Tiriti, only as a translation.</p>	<p>34 search results</p> <p>A broad analysis: The term 'treaty' is used to refer to the Treaty of Waitangi, highlighting its historical signing in 1840 and its ongoing significance in shaping relationships between the Crown and Māori."</p> <p>It is also used side by side with 'tiriti', almost as a translation.</p>	<p>3 search results</p> <p>Page 29 - Purpose statement for te ao tangata “Central to this in Aotearoa New Zealand is an understanding of the responsibilities deriving from Te Tiriti o Waitangi The Treaty of Waitangi of engaging in powersharing and in honourable relationships, and of respecting tikanga and the natural environment.”</p> <p>The term is used in this whakatauki on page 30 “Kaua e uhia Te Tiriti o Waitangi ki te kara o Ingarangi. Engari me uhi anō ki tōu kahu Māori, ki te kahu o tēnei motu ake. Do not drape The Treaty of Waitangi with the Union Jack of England, but rather with your Māori cloak, which is of this country.” (Āperahama Taonui, 1863)</p> <p>On page 30, it appears in the context of the difference between the English and Māori versions of the treaty.</p> <p>The term treaty is not dominant in this document.</p>

Tiriti	<p>1 search result</p> <p>Page 6 - Purpose & Scope Together, the two documents will help schools give effect to the partnership that is at the core of our nation's founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi.</p> <p>This document showcases the term as a translation. Little to no te reo Māori language present.</p>	<p>24 search results</p> <p>The term can be viewed as a Māori translation of the word treaty in most of the document.</p> <p>Heavy on historical context when using different terms in the document.</p>	<p>40 search results</p> <p>Page 13 - Design & purpose of Te Mātaiaho</p> <p>Te Mātaiaho is designed to help ākongā understand what it means to live in Aotearoa New Zealand and the world, and their place in them. Central to this is a deepening of their understanding of Te Tiriti and its principles and the mutual obligations that derive from these.</p> <p>The term Tiriti is dominant in this document. Heavy on a te ao Māori lens approach. Very descriptive and detailed in terms of explaining how the curriculum should be interpreted, understood and implemented. Te reo Māori is actively used in the document.</p>
Non-Māori	<p>1 search result</p> <p>Page 14- Official languages "By learning te reo and becoming increasingly familiar with tikanga, Māori students strengthen their identities, while non-Māori journey towards shared cultural understandings."</p>	<p>3 search results</p> <p>Page 25-Progress outcomes "The Waitangi Tribunal investigation process and subsequent settlements by the Crown have provided an opportunity for reconciliation and greater engagement by non-Māori with the Treaty."</p> <p>Page 28- Progress "The Waitangi Tribunal investigation process and subsequent settlements by the Crown have provided an opportunity for reconciliation and greater engagement by non-Māori with the Treaty."</p> <p>"The Waitangi Tribunal investigation process and subsequent settlements by the Crown have provided an opportunity for reconciliation and greater engagement by non-Māori with the Treaty."</p> <p>Every time the term is used in this document, it involves the Waitangi Tribunal.</p>	<p>2 search results</p> <p>The term is used in the document as a descriptor to explain what tangata Tiriti and tauwiwi are.</p>

Thematic analysis

In this stage of analysis, the findings are organised to reflect the themes that emerged from a close reading of the curriculum documents. Guided by Bowen's (2009) framework for document analysis as a qualitative research method, thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of meaning across the texts. Three key themes emerged: the terms that are used about the bicultural relationship are not stable, there have been changes in the use and integration of te reo Māori, and the bicultural relationship is expressed differently across the curriculum documents.

Terms that are used in the curriculum documents

Comparative reading of the three curriculum documents reveals clear shifts in language that reflect deeper changes in how the bicultural relationship is conceptualised, particularly concerning Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This section identifies patterns and shifts in terminology that reflect different understandings of identity, partnership, and Treaty-based relationships in education.

The Treaty of Waitangi and Te Tiriti o Waitangi

The bicultural relationship between Māori and the Crown was established with the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840. As the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand, this treaty has become a central reference point for understanding the rights, responsibilities, and relational dynamics between the two groups represented in the signing of the treaty. I looked for the terms "Treaty of Waitangi" and "Te Tiriti o Waitangi" in curriculum documents because language choices reflect deeper values, priorities, and shifts in educational discourse. There are two versions of the treaty document, an English version and a Māori version. These versions do not say the same things about what was agreed to when the treaty was signed. In more recent history, it was assumed that "Treaty of Waitangi" referred to the Māori version of the document, but it has now become the norm to refer to the Māori version as Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

In the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), the term "Treaty of Waitangi" is used to refer to the 1840 document. While it is assumed that the term is referring to the Māori version, this clarification does not appear anywhere in the curriculum. The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories

Curriculum (2022) uses both "Te Tiriti o Waitangi" and "Treaty of Waitangi," often interchangeably, while Te Mātaiaho (2023), the Refreshed New Zealand Curriculum, uses Te Tiriti o Waitangi exclusively.

Partnership

Partnership is often thought to be the expression of the bicultural or Tiriti-based relationship between Māori and the Crown. This concept emerges directly from the guarantees of participation and protection embedded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, particularly the assurance of a relationship founded on mutual respect and shared decision-making (Bishop & Glynn, 2003). Given its foundational role, I looked for occurrences of "partnership" in the curriculum documents and how this concept was expressed.

In the 2007 New Zealand Curriculum, "partnership" is mentioned but in abstract or generalised terms. It tends to be treated as a principle rather than an active practice, with mention of Treaty principles without elaboration (Skerrett, 2011). While there is a reference to partnership, there is no guidance on what partnership could look like in teaching and learning, school governance, or relationships with whānau and local iwi.

Although the term 'partnership' appears only twice in the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022), the overview (p.3) includes the Understand (Big Ideas), Know (Contexts), and Do (Inquiry) strands, which draw on a range of historical contexts to express the bicultural nature of the relationship. It encourages critical inquiry into how this relationship has evolved, including moments of cooperation, conflict, and ongoing efforts toward partnership (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Te Mātaiaho (2023) significantly broadens the scope and depth of the term "partnership." Rather than limiting the idea to the Crown-Māori relationship, it expands partnership to include relationships among ākonga, whānau, hapū, iwi, and wider communities. Aitken and Wood (2023) argue that this re-framing reflects a deliberate move toward a more relational and inclusive curriculum, informed by Māori epistemologies. This shift encourages schools to engage more meaningfully with local tangata whenua and to co-construct curriculum that is relevant, localised, and grounded in Māori values.

Tangata Whenua/Māori

Before the arrival of Europeans, the diverse iwi and hapū across Aotearoa identified themselves

by their specific whakapapa, geographic rohe, and ancestral waka, not under a single collective identity. The term Māori, meaning “ordinary” or “normal”, only came into common use following European settlement, when a need arose to distinguish Indigenous people from tauwiwi (foreigners). In contrast, tangata whenua — meaning “people of the land” — is a term grounded in deep ancestral connection to the land, denoting not just occupation but genealogical rights and responsibilities to particular areas. While Māori has become a broad pan-tribal identifier, tangata whenua speaks more specifically to localised identity, authority, and belonging through whakapapa.

In the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007), the term Māori is predominantly used to refer to the indigenous learners of Aotearoa. The term tangata whenua is used descriptively, for example in the sentence “Understand how the status of Māori as tangata whenua is significant for communities in New Zealand” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.51), referring to how students gain knowledge, skills and experience. In contrast, the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2022) marks a significant shift. Here, tangata whenua is used intentionally to ground learning in the histories of local iwi, hapū, and whānau. While the term Māori is still used very frequently in Te Mātaiaho, particularly in broader equity and system-level discussions, Te Mātaiaho emphasises the localised nature of identity and the importance of designing learning in partnership with tangata whenua, for example, “Te Tiriti and its principles (as articulated by the Courts and the Waitangi Tribunal) set out obligations for the Crown and Māori that guide how tangata Tiriti¹ and tangata whenua can live together with mutual respect” (p.8).

Pākehā

In the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), the term Pākehā is used once. References to the partners in the bicultural relationship are generalised rather than naming specific ethnicities. The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022) makes more extensive use of the term, particularly within historical contexts that describe interactions between Māori and early settlers. The absence of the term Pākehā in Te Mātaiaho (2023) may signal an intentional move away from binary ethnic framings, instead privileging more nuanced, Tiriti-based conceptions of identity, relationship, and responsibility.

Non-Māori

In the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), the term “Non-Māori” is used once to refer to an undefined other. The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022) uses the term three times. While this allows for discussion of Māori and non-Māori relations, it risks collapsing the complex and varied identities within the non-Māori category into a single, undifferentiated group. Te Mātaiaho (2023)

does not use the term at all, opting instead for more precise, relational language such as Pākehā, tauiwi, and Tangata Tiriti to refer to the ‘other’. This shift reflects a growing commitment to acknowledging the complexity of identity in Aotearoa and affirms a Tiriti-based approach that foregrounds meaningful and differentiated relationships with Māori.

Tangata Tiriti

Tangata Tiriti is a term that is unique to Te Mātaiaho (2023) and occurs two times. The use of this term to refer to the ‘other’ partner in the relationship represents a significant shift in Tiriti-based identity language, which aims to include all those who are not tangata whenua in a relational, responsibilities-based framework grounded in Te Tiriti (Bidois, 2021).

Inclusion of Te Reo Māori

An increase can be seen in the inclusion and integration of te reo Māori across the three curriculum documents if they are examined chronologically. The New Zealand Curriculum (2007) demonstrates minimal use of te reo Māori. The phrase ‘te reo Māori’ is used to refer to the Māori language, and in the ‘Official Languages of New Zealand’ section of the curriculum, three separate whakataukī are included (p.14). The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022) incorporates more bilingual phrasing and integrates Māori concepts—for example, in the Know (Contexts) strand, 'Whakapapa me te whanaungatanga – Culture and identity' (p.3)."

Te Mātaiaho (2023) has the most integrated and natural use of te reo Māori, through increased bilingualism and in its structural features, such as section headings like Mātainuku, Mātaioho, and Mātaiahikā. This curriculum also embeds Māori worldview concepts in te reo Māori, such as mātauranga Māori, manaakitanga, and rangapū mana taurite. This indicates a deeper commitment to the inclusion of te ao Māori and the revitalisation of te reo Māori.

Different Expressions of the Bicultural Relationship

The New Zealand Curriculum (2007) acknowledges the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand by referencing the Treaty of Waitangi as a founding document. It includes expectations for schools to reflect New Zealand's bicultural heritage and encourages the integration of Te Reo Māori and tikanga Māori into teaching and learning. Māori are identified as tangata whenua, and the curriculum outlines the importance of all students having opportunities to learn about Māori culture, language, and history. The term 'Pākehā' appears once in the document. The curriculum presents the bicultural relationship as unproblematic, with limited reference to historical or ongoing tensions.

The historical foundation of the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022) clearly expresses the bicultural relationship. It uses the past, present, and future to illustrate how this relationship has evolved across the different strands. Each strand is constructed to make the bicultural relationship visible and recognisable, particularly through the bilingual terms referenced in various document contexts.

Te Mātaiaho expresses the bicultural relationship through its co-design by Māori and non-Māori, reflecting a partnership between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti. It integrates mātauranga Māori alongside the existing New Zealand Curriculum and is structured to ensure that both worldviews are present across learning areas. The framework includes principles, values, and progressions that make the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand visible throughout the curriculum.

Summary

The main finding from the analysis presented above is that the bicultural relationship is expressed differently across the three different curriculum documents I examined. The different terms used across the documents illustrate varying representations of the bicultural relationship in the curriculum, ranging from generalised or binary identities to more nuanced, inclusive, and historically grounded expressions of relationship and responsibility. Analysing these patterns reminds us that language choices are not incidental but reflect shifts in values, power, and purpose (Bowen, 2009).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Before undertaking this research, I held various roles within the education sector and often found it difficult to comprehend why enacting a bicultural or Tiriti-based partnership was so challenging, particularly for educators. The lack of consensus around what it means to be bicultural or Treaty-informed created significant barriers for educators striving to develop a unified approach to teaching and learning that could meaningfully engage both Māori and Tangata Tiriti. I also found it overwhelming to witness how some individuals and groups struggled with the practical implications of this relationship. There appeared to be ongoing confusion around expectations, what is required, how to enact those requirements, and the implications for curriculum development, teaching practices, and student outcomes. These experiences led me to question whether the way biculturalism is framed in curriculum documents might be contributing to this confusion, and to explore how this relationship is expressed in familiar education documents.

The main finding of this research is that the bicultural relationship is expressed differently across the three different curriculum documents I examined. This may be part of the reason that educators have difficulty enacting bicultural practices, especially because all three curricula have been available for use in schools since 2023. While Te Mātaiaho (2023) no longer exists in its original form, a point I will return to later, it was in schools for about two years as it was being trialled and developed. This chapter begins with a discussion of the way each of the curriculum documents expresses the bicultural relationship. The second part of the chapter discusses the implications of having three slightly different expressions of the relationship for anyone working in education.

The New Zealand Curriculum (2007)

The language and terminology used in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) reflect a broader pattern of symbolic rather than substantive engagement with the Treaty of Waitangi. The bicultural relationship is framed in English and is presented as unproblematic. As Mutu (2019) notes, references to the Treaty can often appear superficial, lacking contextual depth or critical explanation. Within the NZC, we see the uncritical use of the term “Treaty of Waitangi,” absent of any reference to its contested meanings, colonial implications, or the power imbalances it is meant to redress. The use of a neutralised, English-language framing of the Treaty is emblematic of what Macfarlane et al. (2008) describe as an assimilative approach to educational policy, where biculturalism is named but not genuinely enacted. In this approach, Māori terms and concepts appear in ways that can be perceived as tokenistic, serving more as symbolic gestures than as foundations

for transformative practice. The NZC curriculum presents the concept of partnership as inherently harmonious and uncomplicated, sidestepping the historical and ongoing tensions that define bicultural relationships in Aotearoa (Bell, 2006). As Ritchie and Rau (2006) point out, this narrative risks masking the realities of colonisation, systemic inequities, and the complexities involved in forming authentic Tiriti-based partnerships in education.

The terminology used to describe Māori learners also reflects limited engagement with the depth and diversity of Māori identity. The curriculum frequently refers to “Māori” as a homogenous category, typically concerning achievement gaps, targeted support, or cultural inclusion strategies, by stating “The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand. All students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga.” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9) without recognising the distinctiveness of iwi, hapū, and localised identities (Berryman & Eley, 2017). The near absence of terms such as tangata whenua further dilutes the significance of local authority, whenua-specific knowledge, and the implications of place-based identity in education (Mutu, 2019). Meanwhile, the dominant cultural group, mentioned once in the document as “Pākehā” or simply left unnamed, is largely positioned as the default norm. This lack of critical interrogation reinforces the invisibility of Pākehā dominance, making it more difficult to disrupt colonial assumptions embedded within curriculum design and delivery.

Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum

The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (ANZHC) (Ministry of Education, 2022) signals a more deliberate shift toward a bicultural and Treaty-informed educational approach. One of the most notable developments is the inclusion of both “Te Tiriti o Waitangi” and “Treaty of Waitangi.” While this dual usage reflects a growing awareness of the need to acknowledge Te Tiriti as the Māori text, the interchangeable use of these terms suggests a transitional phase—one that attempts to balance recognition without fully confronting the substantive differences between the two versions.

A more significant shift in ANZHC is the intentional use of the term tangata whenua, which grounds learning in the specific histories and relationships of local iwi, hapū, and whānau. This represents a clear move away from the homogenisation of Māori identity seen in earlier documents. By acknowledging Māori as tangata whenua, the curriculum affirms Indigenous agency, mana whenua, and enduring relationships to place, thus reframing Māori not as a monolithic group but as diverse communities with unique whakapapa, experiences, and rights (Hemara, 2022). This linguistic and

conceptual shift enables deeper, more meaningful engagement with Māori worldviews and histories, supporting learners to critically examine the foundations of Aotearoa’s social and political landscape.

The increased inclusion of te reo Māori within the ANZHC further reflects a move toward a culturally responsive framework. “The curriculum uses headings such as ‘Whakapapa me te whanaungatanga,’ ‘Tino rangatiratanga me te kāwanatanga,’ and ‘Tūrangawaewae me te kaitiakitanga.’” (Ministry of Education, 2022, p 3). The use of the language is not merely symbolic—it aligns with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, particularly Article Two, which affirms the protection of taonga such as te reo Māori (Ministry of Education, 2020). In this sense, the curriculum becomes a mechanism for upholding Treaty obligations by embedding te reo and mātauranga Māori as integral components of historical learning, rather than optional additions. Collectively, these shifts demonstrate that the ANZHC makes more substantial strides toward a bicultural model of education than its predecessors, although tensions and inconsistencies remain in how this commitment is articulated and operationalised. One key inconsistency or tension within the ANZHC is the balance between national coherence and localised histories. While the curriculum aims to uphold a bicultural framework by embedding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and centring Māori perspectives, it simultaneously emphasises localised content and community-specific histories. This creates tension in how consistently bicultural principles are applied across schools; some educators may be well supported to deliver rich, iwi-specific content, while others may lack the relationships, resources, or confidence to do so. As a result, the expression of biculturalism can vary significantly between schools and regions, potentially undermining the curriculum’s intent to create a shared understanding of Aotearoa’s histories grounded in Te Tiriti-based partnership (Ritchie & Johnson, 2011).

Te Mātaiaho (2023)

Te Mātaiaho (Ministry of Education, 2023) represents a substantial shift in the way biculturalism and Treaty-based partnership are expressed within a curriculum. Most notably, it marks a decisive move away from the interchangeable use of “Treaty of Waitangi” and “Te Tiriti o Waitangi,” instead exclusively using the Māori text—Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This linguistic choice signals a decolonising approach that centres te ao Māori, affirms the mana and authority of the Māori version, and grounds the curriculum in the original intentions of Te Tiriti. As Aitken and Wood (2023) explain, this is not merely a semantic distinction; rather, it reflects a deepening commitment to authentic partnership, sovereignty, and the recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems as foundational to educational practice.

As Rozas (2024) observes, the curriculum refresh was partly a response to longstanding critiques that the 2007 curriculum failed to centre mātauranga Māori and localised Indigenous knowledge. However, the continued conflation of Te Tiriti and the Treaty may obscure the distinct intent, content, and implications each holds for genuine partnership. The idea of authentic partnership aligns with long-standing calls by Māori scholars and communities for equitable power-sharing in education. Early on, Durie (1998) emphasised the need for educational models that support tino rangatiratanga and foster collaborative, reciprocal relationships between schools and Māori communities. Te Mātaiaho responds to these calls by embedding Māori values and worldviews not only into content but also into the structure and intent of the curriculum itself.

One of the clearest manifestations of this shift, the move from a general or tokenistic inclusion of Māori toward a more explicit, respectful, and central positioning of Māori as tangata whenua, is the intentional and central use of the term tangata whenua. In contrast to earlier documents that often generalised Māori identity, Te Mātaiaho positions tangata whenua as foundational to all learning areas, not just within the context of history. This reframing affirms the localised, place-based identities of iwi and hapū and acknowledges the authority of mana whenua in shaping learning that is relevant, relational, and responsive (Ministry of Education, 2023). While the term “Māori” continues to appear—especially in discussions of system-level equity—Te Mātaiaho promotes a more nuanced and localised understanding of identity, advocating for the design of learning in partnership with tangata whenua (Waitangi Tribunal, 2011). In doing so, it elevates Indigenous voices and ways of knowing from the margins to the centre of educational design.

Moreover, Te Mātaiaho represents the most integrated use of te reo Māori in national curriculum development to date. Its increased bilingualism is not limited to vocabulary but is structurally

embedded—evident in section headings such as Mātai-nuku, Mātai-oho, and Mātai-ahikā, which reflect Māori concepts of learning, progression, and belonging. Throughout the curriculum, Māori worldview principles—such as mātauranga Māori, manaakitanga, and rangapū mana taurite—are woven into pedagogical expectations and curriculum frameworks, marking a significant shift toward meaningful inclusion. This structural and conceptual integration of te reo Māori supports the revitalisation of language as a taonga and reinforces Article Two of Te Tiriti, which affirms the Crown’s obligation to protect and uphold te reo (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Taken together, these shifts reflect a more balanced, authentic, and transformative expression of biculturalism—one that moves decisively beyond tokenism. By centring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, positioning tangata whenua as core to educational design, and embedding te ao Māori in both language and structure, Te Mātaiaho presents the most robust example to date of a curriculum grounded in the dual cultural foundation of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Navigating Different Expressions of a Bicultural Relationship

The varying expressions of the bicultural relationship across the three curriculum documents, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007), the *Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum* (2022), and *Te Mātaiaho* (2023) have significant implications for how biculturalism is understood, interpreted, and enacted within schools.

In *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007), the bicultural relationship is acknowledged but remains largely aspirational. The curriculum refers to the “principles of the Treaty of Waitangi” and the “bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand” (p. 7), but does so in broad and generalised terms, with little guidance on implementation. As Ritchie and Rau (2006) and Milne (2013) note, this symbolic framing lacks the depth required to transform practice. Māori perspectives are referenced but not centred, and there is a conspicuous absence of clear frameworks for engaging with mana whenua or embedding mātauranga Māori across learning areas (Berryman & Eley, 2017). Consequently, educators are left with considerable discretion

— and thus inconsistency — in interpreting and applying Treaty-based principles. Without systemic support or clarity, many educators find it difficult to go beyond superficial inclusion and engage in meaningful bicultural practice. This situation reinforces existing power imbalances and undermines the transformative potential of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022) appears willing to confront the realities of colonisation and acknowledge Māori resistance, agency, and land-based relationships (Hemara, 2022; Ritchie & Hutchings, 2021). It grounds historical learning in the perspectives of iwi, hapū, and whānau, introducing more critical and nuanced narratives. However, the inconsistent use of “Treaty” and “Te Tiriti” throughout the document reflects a continued tension between institutional caution and decolonising intent (Mutu, 2019). This interchangeability risks blurring the fundamental differences between the English and Māori texts, differences that are central to understanding breaches of Te Tiriti and the struggle for Māori sovereignty (Mikaere, 2011). While the curriculum moves towards a more relational and inclusive approach, it stops short of fully centring Te Tiriti as the authoritative foundation of bicultural partnership. For educators, this ambiguity can lead to confusion about which version of the Treaty to privilege, and how to translate historical awareness into pedagogical and institutional change.

In contrast, Te Mātaiaho (2023) offers the most cohesive and actionable framework for a Tiriti-based education system. It centres Te Tiriti o Waitangi, not just in language but in structure, worldview, and intent. Concepts such as mana ōrite, rangapū mana taurite, and tino rangatiratanga are embedded throughout the document, providing a robust foundation for equity and power-sharing in education (Reid et al., 2023). The co-design process with Māori, the emphasis on relational partnerships with tangata whenua, and the structural use of te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori reflect a curriculum grounded in the aspirations and authority of Māori communities (Macfarlane et al., 2022). This approach not only reframes Māori as active co-constructors of education but also challenges educators to critically examine their roles within an evolving system that aspires to decolonise.

However, the ambition of Te Mātaiaho also presents challenges. Its success depends on the readiness of educators, leaders, and governance structures to engage with its principles in practice. As Berryman and Eley (2017) caution, policy alone is insufficient, without systemic support, professional development, and a commitment to relational practice, even the most progressive curriculum may fail to shift entrenched norms. For educators, this meanstranscending mere content delivery to reflect on their cultural positioning, developing competencies in te reo and tikanga

Māori, and actively engaging with mana whenua in the co-construction of the curriculum.

Taken together, these three curriculum documents illustrate a trajectory from symbolic to substantive engagement with biculturalism. Yet the coexistence of these frameworks, each with differing degrees of clarity, ambition, and conceptual coherence, places educators in a complex and sometimes contradictory policy landscape. Without alignment or a unified national strategy for implementation, educators are left to navigate these tensions independently. This can create uncertainty, inconsistency, and, for some, resistance, particularly where the implications of power-sharing and decolonisation are not well understood or supported. Ultimately, the differing expressions of the bicultural relationship within national curricula demand a critical and courageous response from the education sector. If Te Tiriti o Waitangi is to be more than an aspirational principle, educators must be equipped, supported, and challenged to centre Māori knowledge, authority, and aspirations in their daily practice. Only then can biculturalism move from the margins to the centre of Aotearoa New Zealand's education system.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This research was undertaken in response to observing the challenges educators face in enacting bicultural practices. I wanted to investigate whether the way the bicultural relationship was framed in curriculum documents might contribute to this confusion. I analysed the three curriculum documents focusing on who is considered to be part of the relationship, the language and terminology relating to the relationship, and how the relationship itself is expressed within each document. My findings revealed that all three documents—the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022), and Te Mātaiaho (2023)- express the bicultural relationship in different ways, highlighting a lack of consistency that may contribute to the ongoing difficulty in understanding and enacting biculturalism in educational settings.

The findings from this research have important implications for education and educators. The variation in how the bicultural relationship is expressed across the three curriculum documents suggests a lack of coherence and clarity at a national level. For educators, this can create uncertainty around how to interpret and implement Te Tiriti-based practice in meaningful ways. When curriculum documents differ in how they define, describe, and express the relationship between Māori and non-Māori, it becomes harder for teachers to develop a consistent and confident approach to biculturalism. Notably, all three documents, the New Zealand Curriculum (2007), the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories Curriculum (2022), and Te Mātaiaho (2023), have been in use alongside each other in the education system, further contributing to mixed messages and conceptual ambiguity. The findings indicate that the expression of the bicultural relationship in education documents is continuously changing.

This is especially evident in the ongoing redevelopment of Te Mātaiaho (2023), where, apart from its name and the overarching spiral framework grounded in Māori concepts, much of the original version is being reworked. In Te Mātaiaho (2023), Mātairangi (The Guiding Kaupapa) is explained as “The overarching kaupapa, expressing the centrality of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles, and New Zealand’s vision for education. In the Junior English Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2025), this has been replaced with “The overarching Kaupapa guiding the curriculum, based on the science of learning and ensuring excellent and equitable outcomes for students”. In the draft Secondary English curriculum, there is no reference to Te Mātaiaho

as a framework at all. Education Minister Erica Stanford has given her assurance that Te Mātaiaho as a framework will remain, but that work needs to be done on it. (Gerritsen, April, 2025).

Strengths and limitations of the research

One of the key strengths of document analysis is the ability to closely examine and explore the language, structure, and underlying assumptions within documents (Bowen, 2009). This enables researchers to uncover how ideas, values, and relationships are framed and communicated. Another strength is the capacity to identify patterns, shifts, and inconsistencies across documents over time. This is particularly valuable when comparing how key concepts are expressed in different versions of the curriculum, revealing how understandings of relationships like that between Māori and non-Māori evolve or diverge. Additionally, document analysis is a non-intrusive method that relies on publicly available data, making it both practical and efficient. It allows researchers to access rich sources of information without requiring direct involvement from participants.

While document analysis offers valuable insights into how curriculum texts frame key ideas, it also has limitations. One major weakness is that it does not provide information about how these documents are understood or enacted by educators in practice. The analysis is confined to what is written, rather than how it is interpreted, negotiated, or applied in real-world educational settings. Another limitation is the study's scope, which focused on only three curriculum documents. While these are significant educational documents, it is not certain that they are the primary sources educators turn to for guidance on the bicultural relationship. This raises questions about how representative the findings are of the wider educational experience, and whether other influential resources, such as professional development materials, school-based policies, or iwi-led initiatives, might offer different or more practical understandings of biculturalism.

Recommendations

A general recommendation from this research is the need for greater consistency and clarity in how the bicultural relationship between Māori and non-Māori is represented across curriculum documents. Given the significance of this relationship in Aotearoa New Zealand's education

system and its foundation in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, curriculum documents must offer coherent, accessible, and meaningful guidance. In the current political climate, where conversations about biculturalism can be polarising, clear and respectful representations of this relationship are especially important. Strengthening these representations can help support educators in their understanding and implementation of bicultural practice, ensuring that the curriculum continues to uphold the values of partnership, respect, and equity at the heart of our shared educational future.

A valuable direction for further study would be to explore how educators themselves interpret and make sense of the curriculum's representations of the bicultural relationship. While this research focused on analysing what is written in curriculum documents, it is educators who are tasked with enacting these texts in real-world school or classroom settings. Investigating their lived experiences and interpretations would provide critical insight into how the intent of the curriculum is understood, negotiated, and applied in practice. Such research could also reveal the extent to which educators feel supported or challenged in implementing bicultural approaches, and whether the language and framing of the curriculum help or hinder this process. A closer look at how educators interpret the Māori–non-Māori relationship within their own professional and cultural contexts would deepen our understanding of the gaps between curriculum intent and educational reality.

Concluding comments

This research has highlighted the complexities and inconsistencies in how the bicultural relationship between Māori and non-Māori, as established by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, is expressed across key curriculum documents in Aotearoa New Zealand. While each document reflects a commitment to biculturalism, the varied ways in which this relationship is represented can create uncertainty for educators tasked with bringing these principles to life. Understanding these differences is an important step toward clarifying how biculturalism can be more coherently and meaningfully expressed in education. Ultimately, this research reaffirms the need for ongoing reflection, dialogue, and collaboration to ensure that the curriculum not only reflects Te Tiriti commitments in theory but also supports their realisation in practice.

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