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'The school is really an English school, so, I guess you just speak English': settler colonialism's impact on te reo Māori use by young Māori men

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ABSTRACT

Globally, Indigenous languages face specific challenges to their revitalisation. In this article, I explore the ongoing barrier of settler colonialism to the revitalisation of te reo Māori (the Māori language). Through engaging in affective-discursive analysis of semi-structured interviews with twenty-two young Māori men, this article focuses on how young Māori take up or reject particular affective-discursive positions embedded in settler colonialism norms that discourage engaging with te reo Māori. I first explore how settler colonialism operates through the 'choice' to study (or not study) te reo Māori as an elective in English-medium schools. This analysis highlights how the 'choice' to not take the language is rooted settler colonial norms that frame te reo Māori negatively. Contexts that helped disrupt settler colonial attitudes about te reo Māori are then discussed. The roles of whānau (extended family), whānau-like collectives like kapa haka (Māori performing arts) groups, and conscientization are emphasised as formative to disrupting settler colonialism norms about te reo Māori. Lastly, I offer recommendations for te reo Māori language revitalisation, particularly as they relate to Māori youth.

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Introduction

Foundational to the barriers for linguistic revitalisation of Indigenous languages is settler colonialism. Settler colonial nations such as New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Canada, seek to eliminate Indigenous languages and replace them with the settler language.¹ This has often occurred within an educational context, requiring Indigenous children to learn the colonial language, often while being punished for speaking their Indigenous language.^{2,3} Further, settler colonial nations have an array of national narratives, discourses, and government policies that reinforce the linguistic hierarchy of colonial languages over Indigenous languages (and other minority languages) that have been fundamental to the destruction of Indigenous languages and linguistic vitality.⁴ To highlight the impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous languages, I present a brief example, focusing on New Zealand context, and how different settler colonial acts and national discourses have shaped English and te reo Māori use over time.

Understanding the New Zealand context

Māori were the first to arrive in what is known today as New Zealand in approximately the thirteenth century.⁵ Upon arrival to New Zealand, Māori fostered deep connections with this whenua (land) that nurtured the development of diverse iwi (tribe, extended kinship group), hapū (subtribe, kinship group), and whānau (extended family) that now pattern Aotearoa.⁶ It was within this context that the Māori language, te reo Māori, was developed. The language served as the everyday language of the country, able to carry all aspects of daily life for the estimated 100,000–200,000 Māori who lived in New Zealand at first contact with Europeans during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

During early contact with Europeans in the nineteenth century, Māori actively sought to complement mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems) with Western knowledge.⁷ Māori engaged with Western schooling in subjects like reading and mathematics within the English school curriculum, but through the medium of te reo Māori as the dominant language of the country. Consequently, te reo Māori was the primary spoken and written language for Māori, with some also developing proficiency in English.⁸ Bilingualism was also common for Europeans who spent long periods of time in the country, with missionaries, traders, and many European settlers speaking te reo Māori.

In 1840, Tiriti o Waitangi (1840) was signed by rangatira (chiefs of hapū) by many, but not all, hapū, and the representative of Queen Victoria, affirming the relationship between Māori and the United Kingdom.⁹ In Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the reassurance that the Queen will control British citizen who have moved to Aotearoa, that she will respect and uphold the self-determination and authority of rangatira and hapū, and that English culture will be available to Māori.¹⁰ This agreement is widely considered the founding document of the nation, and an aspirational vision for a biculturalism.¹¹

However, this vision of biculturalism was quickly eroded as larger numbers of British (and other European) settlers arrived. For example, the Education Ordinance 1847 stated that all state sponsored schools must provide education in English, effectively preventing te reo Māori as a language of instruction in state funded schools.¹² The Native Schools Act 1867 and School Attendance Act of 1894 further served to enforce English as sole language of education for all children in New Zealand.¹³ Education thus played a crucial role in the settler colonial project seeking to instil British norms through a focus on young people. Following land confiscations in Taranaki and Waikato, Governor Grey specifically mentioned English education as a method of assimilation.¹⁴ While there is research that asserts many Māori desired that their children learn English (and learn in English),¹⁵ the removal of the option to learn in te reo Māori alongside English has been recognised as contravening what was agreed to within Te Tiriti o Waitangi.¹⁶

These policies, coupled with both the loss of economic land-base for hapū due to land confiscation, and the rapid urbanisation of Māori communities in the twentieth century, led to a rapid decline of the number of Māori who were proficient in te reo Māori.¹⁷ This was made visible nationally through the 1970s socio-linguistic survey of language use in Māori households in 100 communities, led by Richard Benton.¹⁸ The survey found that the use of te reo Māori had declined dramatically in all but a few of the 100 communities surveyed, and that of the 17.9% of Māori were proficient speakers. Of particular concern was the limited intergenerational transmission of the language, with proficiency residing mainly in older generations, and few children using it. This research mobilised an array

of whānau, hapū, iwi, and Māori communities to consciously work to revitalise the language and prevent its extinction.

These efforts have created a Māori educational pathway spanning from kindergarten (known as *kōhanga reo* or language nests) through to tertiary education pathways available in *te reo Māori*.¹⁹ Equally, there is a significant number of adult learning of language across the nation, many of whom learn the language through programmes like *Te Ataarangi*, a community-driven immersion language learning approach using Cuisenaire rods.²⁰ These efforts (most often grassroots and community-led) have helped to nurture generations of proficient speakers of the language across the country.²¹

However, the majority of Māori do not speak *te reo Māori* proficiently today, and the majority Māori are educated through English-medium schooling. According to the 2018 census, there were roughly 186,000 speakers of *te reo Māori* and 23,000 speakers of NZSL in New Zealand, compared with almost 4.5 million speakers of English.²² *Te Kupenga* a post-census survey conducted in 2018 of almost 8,500 Māori (aged 15 years and over) highlighted that roughly 17.5% of Māori spoke *te reo Māori* very well or fairly well.²³ However, those aged between 15 and 24 reported slightly higher rates of confidence in using *te reo Māori*, with over 19% reporting that they spoke *te reo Māori* very well or fairly well. As such, while there has been some shifts in policy landscape to support revitalisation of *te reo Māori*, there are still clear barriers impeding the revitalisation of the language, including settler colonialism. For a more comprehensive engagement with the political and policy shifts please refer to *Ka'ai-Mahuta*²⁴ or *Hōhepa*.²⁵

Challenges to revitalising te reo Māori today

The currently literature about *te reo Māori* has highlighted a range of factors that constrain its revitalisation. These include structural factors like resources available to a person (most notably time and money), demography (number of proficient speakers where a person lives), language status (how the language is perceived) and national language planning (more commonly policy and action to support language acquisition)²⁶ Equally, research about *te reo Māori* highlights that individual factors like aptitude, attitude, learner strategies, and emotions are also critical factors in support proficiency in *te reo Māori*.²⁷ *Pohe*²⁸ also discusses the importance of a language community and *whanaungatanga* (relationality, good relationships) in supporting use and proficiency in *te reo Māori*.

However, there is limited empirical work that explores how settler colonialism inhibits the learning of *te reo Māori*, with some exceptions.²⁹ Both national and international research highlights the importance of transmission of language from one generation to the next for the survival of a language.^{30,31} As such, young people play a crucial role in the survival of a language, but this proves difficult if they are enmeshed in a settler colonial context that constrains the ability to use the language. This is likely an issue for the majority of Māori, given that over 90% of Māori students are enrolled in English language medium schools.³²

Further, there appears to be a gendered nature to engaging with *te reo Māori*, especially as a heritage language learner. Based on data from tertiary enrolments in *te reo Māori* language courses, enrolments by Māori women are roughly three times higher than by Māori men.³³ This is consistent with the census data that shows that

Māori women report higher rates of proficiency than Māori men.³⁴ Te Huia³⁵ proposes that these gender differences may be related to Māori women's specific responsibilities as bearers of whakapapa feel greater responsibilities to learn te reo Māori and other cultural knowledge to pass on to the next generation. However, there is limited exploration of what other factors may underpin the gender differences in engaging with te reo Māori, particularly amongst Māori youth.

As such, this research looks to explore how settler colonialism impacts how young Māori men engage with te reo Māori in English-medium schools. While English-medium schools have played a central role in the dominant of te reo Māori, there is increasing momentum in policy and community to grow the use of te reo Māori through English-medium schooling.³⁶ The following research questions guide the analysis:

- How does settler colonialism shape the decision of young Māori men to study te reo Māori as an elective in English medium schooling?
- What contexts support young Māori men to challenge settler colonial norms and engage with te reo Māori in English medium schooling?

To address these questions, I engage in discursive-affective analysis of interview data with 22 young Māori men. In doing so, I provide an explicit example of how settler colonialism impacts Indigenous language revitalisation efforts. In focusing on the specificities of how young Māori men engage with the dominant discourses about te reo Māori, I highlight how Māori differently engage with accepting, refuting, and resisting the dominant settler colonial ideas about English and te reo Māori. These different stances highlight both how settler colonialism continues to operate (particularly in educational contexts), but also highlights how family and deeper educational practices can disrupt the dominant ideas about te reo Māori.

Methods

This analysis is drawn from one chapter of my PhD thesis³⁷ that considers how young Māori men make sense of their identity while growing up in urban contexts, informed by own upbringing in the city. This study had ethic approval granted by the University of Auckland in 2019 but was underpinned by relational ethics central to Māori and Indigenous ways of being and knowing.^{38,39,40}

I engaged in semi-structured interviews with 22 young Māori men in Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland, aged between 16 and 24 years old that explored their sense of culture, masculinity, and identity. Interviews took place in an array of locations. For those who were still in secondary education (14), these took place at the school, and were supported by one of the Māori staff of the school. For those who were post-secondary education (8), these interviews took place at a location of their preference including the University of Auckland (4), in public spaces such as parks or cafes (3), and online (1).

The majority (21) reported limited proficiency in the language (ranging from knowledge of some words to limited conversational ability), with only one reporting that he had a high degree of proficiency. The young Māori men in the study had an array of

iwi affiliations, but the most common affiliations were to iwi from the northern half of Aotearoa. Fourteen were attending secondary school, five were in tertiary education, two were in full-time employment, and one was currently unemployed. All current secondary school students went to English-medium schools, with the secondary school students attending a school where roughly 20% of students identified as Māori. Recruitment occurred using an array of approaches including through school staff (for those still in secondary education), snowballing, and social media, reflecting the need for a diverse array of engagement processes to facilitate recruitment.

Interviewing took place at a location which suited the needs of participants. Participants were given an information sheet containing information about the project, my whakapapa, the research team and intentions for future dissemination of the results. They were also informed that the interviews would be audio recorded for transcription and that quotes may be used in final research project. Food was shared before beginning the interviews, which lasted between 40 min and two hours, with an average of roughly one hour. Interviews were transcribed verbatim.

A culturally grounded approach to interviewing was used in this project. When I met participants, we would spend time engaging in whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building), finding shared connection and interests before turning to the research project at hand. Self-disclosure was crucial to this process, including the sharing of my own whakapapa (genealogy, ancestral connections) and my own experiences growing up as a young Māori man. I opened and closed the space with karakia (an incantation or prayer) and blessed the food if participants were interested in this or offered them the opportunity to do so.

Interview topics included discussion of whakapapa, home and what this means, connection to culture and te reo Māori, Māori masculinity and important relationships in their life. Throughout this process and the interviews, I checked in to make sure that participants were comfortable with the process. Interviews were done predominantly in English, but some participants often incorporated te reo Māori to highlight a point or express a term that may not translate readily into English. My use of te reo Māori was guided by a participant's comfort and interest in using te reo Māori. All participant information sheets and consent forms were available in English or te reo Māori. Koha (gift or exchange) in the form of a \$50 gift card alongside food was provided. Participants could request to see their transcripts and make edits, as well being able to receive a copy of the research summary once the research was completed.

Research approach

This article takes a Kaupapa Māori approach, an approach that presumes the validity and legitimacy of Māori ways of being, knowing, and doing as appropriate and useful to research and praxis.⁴¹ In practice, Kaupapa Māori integrates a structural and cultural analysis to create research that benefits Māori,⁴² often through a combination of critical theory and mātauranga Māori (Māori ways of knowing). Some common principles or foundations of the approach include a commitment to Māori sovereignty, social justice, relationality, centrality of a Māori worldview, and use of te reo Māori when and as appropriate.⁴³ This approach is deliberate in its support of

the revival of Māori practices, ways of making meaning, and insistence on Māori self-determination throughout the research process, while also rejecting a homogenisation of Māori culture.⁴⁴ Kaupapa Māori has also been formative to Māori educational research, where it has been used to centre the importance of Māori cultural practices like whanaungatanga and pūrākau (Māori narratives, cosmologies) as powerful tools for pedagogical practice.^{45,46,47}

Analytic framework

For my analysis, I engage in affective-discursive work. Within this framework, affect and discourse are mutually entangled and cocreated.^{48,49} Affective meaning is layered through how speech is produced and shaped by discursive norms. This approach is useful in heritage language learning research as it highlights how emotions and discourses are developed through relationships to contexts, to histories, to experiences, and to the wider world, enabling us to position the research in context. In this way, an affective-discursive analysis attends to how our embodied expressions of affect and speech are formed through our shared social lives, the representations available to us, and how power shapes the sociocultural contexts we are embedded within.

My approach to affective-discursive analysis originates within the work of Wetherell.^{50,51} She described how people may adopt similar embodied sensations, or feelings, what can be termed affect, around an event as shaped by the social context. For example, in the context of a funeral, there is a collective affect of grief, or remembrance, associated with the shared event. Deviations from this affect may arouse a negative response from the collective engaging in that shared context. Affect then, as a social practice, I argue, can enable, or constrain the desires and ability of young Māori men to engage with te reo Māori. The emotions people feel towards te reo Māori are connected to, and shaped by, their social contexts.

Here, I explore how social contexts of settler colonialism, or the resistance to settler colonialism, inform and shape the diverse affective experiences of young Māori men and te reo Māori. In the analysis, I read the interview transcripts closely and repeatedly to draw out how the young Māori men constructed and related to te reo Māori. Through engaging deeply with the dataset, I focused my analysis on how specific contexts can encourage or discourage Māori youth from engaging with te reo Māori, through focusing on affective positions these contexts can create. I then categorised these affective positions as positive, negative, or ambivalent, and how they were informed by, or resisted, settler colonialism as a way of organising the analysis. Data extracts are used below to both illustrate the major analytic areas. Pseudonyms for participants are used to preserve confidentiality.

Analysis

In the analysis, I first highlight how colonial contexts can create ambivalent affect positions, centring this analysis on subject choice within schools. I then explore how socio-cultural contexts grounded in Māori ways of being and knowing can encourage Māori youth pride and confidence about te reo Māori, in particular looking at the role of whānau and kapa haka contexts in supporting engagement with te reo Māori.

The 'choice' of te reo Māori: accepting dominant ideas about te reo Māori in schools

For Māori youth who went to English-medium schools, many described how te reo Māori *seemed like something in the background* (Matiu). Apart from particular formal contexts like pōwhiri, te reo was marginal to everyday life and English dominated the day-to-day activities. Māori youth thus described school as a place where people *don't really care for the language* (Ari). This contextual ambivalence would then often shape the affective positions of Māori youth about the language, where they also become ambivalent towards te reo Māori.

Schools are a crucial site for disciplining people to knowledge, rules and values needed to survive in society.⁵² Through a variety of policy and structural choices (i.e. compulsory teaching, number of teaching hours a week) schools can assign value to subjects and skills that are taught in schools. In this way, many English-medium schools (re)produce the norms of wider society that Māori youth draw on in their sense making about subjects. This was apparent when Māori youth had the option to take (or more commonly not take) te reo Māori as a subject.

Anaru described his decision to not take te reo like this:

when I was in Year 10 and I was talking to my friends asking "oh what's another subject, I think I might take Māori" they were like "oh nah, I heard there's only a little bit of people in that class, its only for Māori" and hearing that people were saying it was a class you didn't really want to be in. I just thought it to be best if I didn't go to that class and chose something else that wouldn't draw attention to who I was. But now I feel like ... if I was ... more aware of where te reo could get me later on in life. Cause at the time I thought "its just a language, its not really going to do much for my career path" so I'd take an academic subject instead like maths or English or something like that. So I think that's my main reason.

Within this account we get a sense of the various ways in which te reo Māori is marginalised within English-medium school, but also broader colonial contexts. Anaru's friends draw on the dominant discourse of te reo as unusual, both in that there are very few people in the class (and therefore cannot be important), and that it is *only for Māori* (and thus is exclusive, and probably not in a good way). The contested 'usefulness' of te reo Māori has been a persistent finding in research related to the language. Jeurissen's⁵³ research in an all-girls school demonstrated similar discourses about the usefulness of te reo Māori compared to other languages like French and Japanese. Similarly, Albury's⁵⁴ research with Māori and non-Māori also highlights that university students in Otago had similar associations that te reo Māori was a less 'economically' useful language to learn.

The 'choice' of not selecting te reo as a subject for Māori youth highlights how settler colonialism permeates English-medium school contexts few Māori youth 'choose' to take te reo Māori as a subject in English-medium schools.⁵⁵ The education system in New Zealand continues to (re)produce subject hierarchies that are shaped by settler colonial and neoliberal discourses. These discourses, through how they play out in subject hierarchies, render particular subjects and languages more or less desirable than others. Perceptions about the exclusionary nature of te reo Māori and its marginality in school were all drawn from this discourse and woven into how Anaru's friends describe the subject to

him. Te reo Māori then became a poor choice compared to mathematics or English, subjects which are positioned as more ‘sensible’ options for your career.

This framing of te reo Māori erases both the historical context of marginalisation and reclamation of te reo Māori, and the clear links between a strong cultural identity and wellbeing.⁵⁶ Further, it erases that Māori students taught in te reo Māori are more likely to gain national secondary qualifications than those who are taught in English,⁵⁷ as well as providing the necessary literacy requirements for tertiary study in New Zealand. As the dominant discourses (re)present te reo as a ‘bad’ choice, the ambivalent affective position ‘sticks’ to te reo Māori where it can be decontextualised to *just a language* that has little to offer Māori youth in relation to their (economic) future. This is despite the clear benefits both to Māori youth wellbeing, with greater cultural connection associated with better mental health outcomes⁵⁸ and potential career advancement, particularly within education, media, culture, government, and increasingly iwi contexts for those with skills in te reo Māori.⁵⁹

The deeper discursive layers of subject ‘choice’ bring into sharp focus the institutionalisation of English within English-medium schooling and public spaces, and the processes of settler colonialism within New Zealand. In Anaru’s discussion, English is not positioned as ‘a language’ like te reo Māori, reproducing the dominant position of English. Iyengar⁶⁰ argues that institutionalisation of settler colonial languages, like English, is necessary to (re)produce them as the normal or natural language choice. The Settler Contract is the process through which policy, curriculum, and pedagogy is set up to benefit descendants of settlers.⁶¹ Particular institutional policies, at the governmental, but also school-level, continue to constrain the possibilities for biculturalism in New Zealand because the current monoculturalism benefit descendants of settlers. Settler colonialism orients Anaru’s thinking around te reo Māori and English. When discussing the vitality of te reo Māori at his English-medium school, and what it would take to improve it, Eruera shared this insight:

Eruera: “if we were fully immersed in the culture and the reo, if you had teachers speaking to you, students, just like anyone you were talking to in te reo. Then I guess you would pick it up pretty quickly but that’s not really what the school is. The school is really an English school, so, I guess you just speak English.”

Logan: “and how do you find it being in an English school, as you put it?”

Eruera: “nah its fine, cause I can speak English perfectly fine and I’m not really very good at te reo Māori so it doesn’t really affect me that much”.

Eruera, in his restricted vision for te reo within English-medium schooling, reveals the constitutive power that (re)produces settler colonialism in New Zealand. Within the dominant discourses of English-medium education, Eruera’s school has limited obligations towards te reo Māori as an *English school*. As Eruera highlights, this framing permits teachers, students, or anyone in the school to only be proficient in English; expecting people to use te reo Māori in English-medium schools is positioned as unrealistic.

I argue that this expression of settler colonialism enables two (connected) outcomes in the New Zealand context. The first outcome is that the histories of coloniality which have encouraged English proficiency and discouraged proficiency in te reo Māori (and the histories of bilingualism amongst Pākehā in the nineteenth century) fade from view. The

second outcome is that the status quo is presented as culturally neutral.⁶² A ‘common sense’ argument about English as the language everyone speaks (and that most people are best at) enables the ongoing marginalisation of te reo Māori. In this way, the institutionalisation of English continues to (re)create contexts where te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori are marginalised.

Schools are presented as culturally neutral places^{63,64} and yet are laden with assumptions that centring English language (and its associated ways of being and knowing that permeate practice and policy) is the ‘best’ ways to teach all children and young people in New Zealand. The power of English institutionalization and te reo Māori marginalisation can be further illuminated by Māori youth who transitioned from Māori-medium to English-medium schooling. Six Māori youth talked about going to Kōhanga Reo (te reo Māori immersion early childhood education) before transitioning to English immersion primary and high schools. Four went to a kura kaupapa Māori (te reo Māori-medium primary schools) and then transitioned to English-medium intermediate and high schools. Most Māori youth described their experience of transitioning negatively, leading to feelings they *lost* something. None of the Māori youth who had transitioned to English-medium school felt they had retained their previous degree of proficiency, again reinforcing the limits of many English-medium schools to support te reo Māori usage.

For Anaru this impacted his relationship with his cousins who continued through Māori-medium schooling. He spoke of the pride his poppa had in him when he had opted to move from a bilingual classroom to full immersion classroom when he was in primary school, and he would frequently use te reo Māori with his grandparents who lived in the same community as he did. However, it was decided by his whānau that he should move to English-medium schooling for secondary school to gain more *opportunities* (potentially drawing on the discourse of te reo Māori proficiency limiting career possibilities), and so he moved to Auckland for this purpose. Having been in English-medium schooling for four years, and living in Auckland, Anaru was deeply aware of his Māori language skills diminishing and how his cousins would now *mock* him for not speaking the language proficiently:

Anaru: “I would quite often talk in te reo [Māori] at home throughout growing up and primary [school] cause that’s what my nan would speak and she wasn’t too good at English and so I communicate with her and try to learn it that way but ever since coming to school its kind of lost a little bit ...”

Logan: “and what was that like? What were your thoughts or your feelings when that was happening?”

Anaru: “kind of ashamed cause my cousins would laugh at me and they’d say something in te reo and be like “what does that mean? What does that mean?” just mocking me and I felt shamed out I guess, so just yeah pretty shamed.”

As testimony to the power of dominant discourses about te reo Māori, Anaru’s narrative highlights how settler colonial formations about Māori language and culture shape unique affective positions for Māori youth. Caught between two very different sociocultural contexts (his school and whānau contexts), Anaru’s narrative highlights the potential negative impacts of English-medium schooling on use of te reo Māori, and how this might

then impact family relationships. Further, it demonstrates the different possibilities for language maintenance between Māori youth who are embedded in family and Māori-medium contexts, and those who are growing up outside of these contexts. This is a cruel result of an education system that continues to marginalise Māori ways of being and knowing.⁶⁵ Hohepa and Paki⁶⁶ argue that embedding students within *ngā uara* (Māori values) can serve to create a place of belonging and connection in English-medium schools that may support successful transitions between Māori – and English-medium schools.

Māori youth engagement with *te reo Māori* as a subject thus reveals how various organisational levels within the school context (peer, staff and structural) can (re)produce English and settler colonialism. Disrupting the norms that shape Māori youth (and indeed Pākehā and *tauwiwi*) ambivalence to *te reo Māori* requires disrupting settler colonialism and the institutionalisation of English. How some Māori youth achieved this is explored in the subsequent sections.

Māori sociocultural contexts: rejecting settler colonial norms

For Māori youth who had taken *te reo Māori*, they identified a variety of places that could shape affective repertoires of pride and joy in relation to *te reo Māori*. Although English-medium schools were predominantly constructed as places where *te reo Māori* was marginalised, some Māori youth could still locate contexts within them where they experience pride in the language. Taika highlighted his perceptions of *te reo Māori* within the classroom of his English-medium school:

I've learnt so many Māori stories like where my *waka* (ancestral canoe) landed at Kāwhia. So *Tainui waka* I learned about that. I've learned about famous Māori chiefs and famous Māori battles. What's happened over the years ... for Māori [*te reo Māori*] definitely shows us who our people were and what they did before now.

Engaging with *te reo Māori* in school can inform Māori youth understandings of their own sense of Māori culture and identity, potentially deepening their experiences of *whānau*, *whakapapa* (ancestry, heritage, connections) and places they connect to.⁶⁷ Teaching (and learning) *te reo Māori* involves more than simply learning the words, it is connected to the broader narratives and histories of *te ao Māori* (the Māori world).⁶⁸ Taika's ability to learn about *Tainui waka*, and by extension, his own *whakapapa*, enabled him to enhance his own sense of identity as interwoven with the language and stories described in the class. *Te reo Māori* as language that is rooted in particular stories like the landing of *Tainui waka*, enhanced Taika's ability to make sense of his identity and relationship to the wider world in a way that (currently) were foreclosed in other schooling contexts. In this way, the classroom could be a space where settler colonialism was disrupted, highlighted the various ways in which language and identity and interwoven.

Māori youth who are able to engage with *te reo Māori* within the classroom are then afforded greater access to intergenerational wisdom that is often invisibilised or withheld from colonial contexts that might otherwise transform or misrepresent it. This intergenerational wisdom can show us who we are and who *our people were and what they did before now*, helping to guide us towards who we want to be(come), disrupting

Māori youth ambivalence towards the language. Taika said that because of his positive experiences within class, one of his major goals was to become proficient in the language and learn more about where he comes from. The te reo Māori classroom in English medium schools then could represent a site which disrupted the settler colonialism that shapes affect about te reo Māori.

Extending this analysis, for many Māori youth who took te reo Māori as a subject, their engagement was often driven by whānau contexts of love for the language. Many Māori youth who took the language described how their whānau were supporters, motivators and champions for learning the language. Boulton and Gifford⁶⁹ argue that a major driver for whānau action is the desire for children and future generations to have better lives. Similarly, in this research, many parents, grandparents and extended whanaunga were the guides for Māori youth through their intergenerational visions, drawing together dreams and experiences of elders and seeking to imbue them within Māori youth. This act of love could subsequently plant the desire for Māori youth to learn and use te reo Māori, and express pride in being able to show off their skills.

Eruera described his experience of engaging with kapa haka like this:

It was a lot of hard work but then we got to perform it at Polyfest (a festival for secondary students involving traditional music, dance, costume, and cultural speech competitions). I found it pretty cool, being up on stage having the cameras and stuff watching you, filming you, and I got to show my nan on Māori TV and tell her to watch it live. She was really proud of me and so I was pretty happy with that.

While there were challenges and many weeks of preparation that had gone into the performance, having his nana watch this show meant a lot to Eruera, and motivated him to continue learning the language next year. Even though Eruera described being in an *English school*, because of the care, affection, and support of his nan, he was motivated to continue to take te reo Māori as a subject. Being able to perform on stage and show his nan his achievements realised an intergenerational vision his nan had for the whānau. This was deftly recognised by Eruera:

it [performing kapa haka] makes me feel great cause my nan's trying to get me back into something that's slowly faded away after a while and it makes me feel good that she's trying to bring back something.

Reciprocal care within whanau contexts then could provide an alternative to dominant discourses about te reo Māori, firmly centring whānau aspirations as the driver for Māori youth taking te reo Māori as a subject. As such, contexts like the classroom and whānau, that offer counter discourses about the value and significance of the language (both in terms of individual and collective identity and belonging) can disrupt the settler colonial ideas about te reo Māori. Intergenerational family relationships, and especially the role of elders, as knowledge holders within families and drivers of family wellbeing, are thus crucial in supporting the dismantling of settler colonial narratives and growing te reo Māori use and proficiency in Aotearoa.⁷⁰

Kapa haka and te reo Māori

Several Māori youth discussed how kapa haka as whānau-like context had shifted their relationship with te reo Māori and led them to wish they had learnt it earlier. Paul

Whitinui^{71,72,73} highlights the benefits that kapa haka provided Māori students opportunities to engage with te reo Māori and explore their identity. Manaia, when trying to articulate this, said there is:

something about [kapa haka] speaking the language and most of the time I didn't understand it but it just felt good to say the Māori words.

Here, Manaia describes how having a space to speak te reo Māori, in a site that contained fewer 'risks' of being embarrassed, could help him overcome his fears about speaking te reo Māori. He described feeling good just to speak the language; even if he did not understand the words (something which may create fear somewhere else), within the context of kapa haka this fear does not matter. Kapa haka was one place where individually speaking the language was not emphasised, and there were many Māori youth who were also less familiar with the language. Kapa haka in this way can be(come) a context where language learning is embedded within building relationships and strengthening identity with other Māori youth. Kapa haka groups then as a context, could embed the values of care and trust which enable them to be(come) a place to explore identity and learn te reo Māori.

This safe context for collective language learning and speaking could lead to larger-scale shifts in how people perceive themselves. As Manaia articulated:

I see a lot of them changing like one of my other friends like, he's connected with his Māori side a lot and he's actually started to care about the Māori stuff in his life.

In this way, kapa haka could also have wider impacts on Māori youth development, fostering resilience, well-being and helping to rebalance the English-led linguistic hierarchy.^{74,75} Specifically, kapa haka incorporates ancestral ways of being and knowing and can help reclaim contemporary Māori identities through group membership in a supportive environment.⁷⁶ This could open up new possibilities for thinking about nurturing a relationship with te reo Māori and Māori culture. Engaging with contexts like kapa haka that centre Māori ways of being and knowing, but in ways that may be less explicitly focused on learning the language, can foster affective possibilities that support language learning in Māori youth.

Whānau contexts could also provide spaces that nurtured and supported Māori youth unconditionally in their language journey. Whānau networks are underpinned by practices of unconditional love and commitment that fosters an experience of trust and security in children.⁷⁷ Kauri described how his whānau saw his interest in te reo and sought to provide a space of care which could lead it to grow further:

I got more into Māori and learned more about myself and then my parents started to help me because they believed that if they were able to teach me then they'd be able to teach themselves ... my dad always tells this line - as long as you're with family you can mess up its okay, you can mess up and do whatever and they'll help you along the way.

Kauri's parents were unable to speak te reo. However, through seeing Kauri's aspirations to learn te reo, they were able as a whānau to fluidly respond to his aspirations. In taking time to learn the language to be able to support him, his parents highlighted the ways that many older whānau members show love and commitment to children.^{78,79} Having a whānau context where it was clear that he could make mistakes, Kauri could feel

confident to use and engage with te reo Māori in a safe and supportive space. In contrast to school contexts where Māori youth may be exposed to teasing after making mistakes, whānau contexts, as spaces infused with trust and care, could enable them to have confidence in using te reo Māori.

Whānau contexts could also be motivators for learning te reo in unexpected ways. Tiaki, while growing up in Tāmaki Makaurau, did not feel a large pull towards te reo Māori. However, as a young adult he has felt more drawn towards learning it. When I asked whether he thought this might be the case, he stated:

I think family splitting up was the biggest thing. And speaking Māori's always been the loving language in my family. So (yeah), I've always wanted to reconnect with my brothers and sisters who live around the country. So, learning Māori was a way to connect with them. Because they're very invested in Māoridom. I think they went to Māori schools, and I went to a normal school.

In Tiaki's account, we see enduring possibilities for te reo Māori when embedded within whānau contexts. For Tiaki's whānau, te reo Māori was associated with love and care. This sense of love and affection within the language persisted as a thread of connection even when his whānau have been physically separated from him. Growing up going to *a normal school*, Tiaki likely experienced many of the challenges of engaging with te reo Māori described earlier. However, despite how the broader discourses of te reo impacted him growing up, what has endured is a sense of te reo Māori as enabling him to engage with love and reinvigorate his connections to whānau. Tiaki, similar to Taika, highlights the way te reo Māori carries within it a worldview, a set of values, beliefs and history.⁸⁰ Through activating the values and beliefs that are embedded in how whānau use te reo Māori, Māori youth are able to resist the ambivalence that can constrain their engagement.

Whānau contexts, and how they can support or enliven classroom contexts, are in this way crucial to challenging the apathy towards te reo Māori that can permeate the social milieu. One important consideration then, is how these learnings could be extended to Māori youth who may not have these same supports in their whānau contexts. For Taika, and several other Māori youth who discussed the benefits of engaging with te reo as a subject (Te Ariki, Atawhai, Kauri), whānau encouragement had been pivotal in them taking the subject. Māori youth who may have limited access to whānau networks which support te reo Māori, or who have whānau that simply must prioritise other material needs,⁸¹ may then require additional support navigating the barriers to engaging with te reo when facing the dominant contexts of ambivalence.

The value of conscientisation,⁸² the process of conscious-raising through education about the roots of the oppression, can also open up possibilities for action and change in relation to te reo Māori. Given the politicised struggle for te reo Māori, Māori youth who had access to this history often described a strong desire to engage with the language. Tertiary study was one such site for conscientization and disruption of settler colonial norms.

Te Kohatu discussed his relationship to te reo Māori in this way:

I don't regret not taking it at year 11, 12 and 13. Because now, I'm sort of going back with a more focused mindset, focused attitude to learning it. So, I think back then ... I wouldn't have, or at least I was not as willing to or passionate about learning about my culture, whereas now

I am more so. So, I think now when I go back to learn te reo, I'll pick it up quicker because I'm more willing to make it part of who I am.

Te Kohatu identified how his university degree had changed how his perspective on life and given him more passion and will to engage with the language. Although he did not specifically take Māori language courses as part of his degree, he had received mentoring from Māori practitioners in his field. This mentoring had culminated in his Masters thesis that now explicitly took a kaupapa Māori approach:

[M]y thesis has definitely been a big reason for me researching more into my culture for sure. And I've recently extended it because I want to redo it somewhat using kaupapa Māori research methods. I'm trying to not prove necessarily, but show that Māori ways of learning are just as valid in [my area of research].

In this way, greater understanding of Māori ways of being and knowing, and the confidence that comes with that, can open up possibilities to approach te reo Māori differently in ways that can support its revitalisation.⁸³ Simultaneously, there is a clear benefit to developing a knowledge of the history of te reo Māori and Māori culture. In understanding these wider realities, we can locate ourselves and te reo Māori differently and disrupt the settler colonial norms around te reo Māori.

Conclusion

Settler colonialism continues to shape the cultural conditions and possibilities for many Māori youth to live well lives.^{84,85} The foundations of New Zealand as a colony, its reliance on Māori whenua to become Pākehā land, and how the legislative actions and how political decisions of successive governments have transformed this place cannot be understated. The impacts of settler colonialism resound through the narratives of young Māori men and different journeys of language reclamation. Demonstrating the ongoing challenges of reclamation are an urgent task within the current context in Aotearoa.

In this article I aimed to contribute to the wider body of literature demonstrates the pervasive nature of settler colonialism through an exploration of engagement with te reo Māori by young Māori men. In exploring affective-discursive practice, I highlighted how the social milieu today still privileges English as the norm, as revealed through the 'choice' to take te reo Māori as a subject at school. In particular, I have highlighted how English-medium schools, as a microcosm for wider society, were contexts that created affective possibilities that shift some Māori youth away from engaging with te reo Māori. However, there are also stories of Indigenous resistance that continue to emerge. McCarty⁸⁶ and Olsen-Reeder⁸⁷ in their discussions of Indigenous languages rights and revitalisation, direct us to move away from tales of loss and extinction towards reclamation and empowerment. These stories of empowerment were woven throughout many of youth who participated in my research, as shown through how they could reject the norms of settler colonialism in different ways.

Specifically, my results highlight that when young Māori men are supported within whānau contexts that nurture te reo Māori, they were more likely to find pride in the language that helped to dismantle settler colonial norms around the language. Similarly, when they were in like whānau-like contexts, spaces like the Māori language classroom or kapa haka, they could also find connection and belonging that enabled them to continue

to learn the language, as well as learning Māori ways of being and knowing that could disrupt settler colonialism. Further, conscientisation to the wider settler colonial context could also motivate people to learn the language, forming a foundation of understanding for the importance of the language. As such, efforts to conscientize and/or create whānau-like conditions are likely to also promote language revitalisation for young Māori men. These foundations provide an opportunity for supporting revitalisation initiatives for te reo Māori.

As this work focused on young Māori men, it is difficult to state how these results may resonate with other genders. Previous research has highlighted for Māori women the centrality of raising children in motivating their engagement with te reo Māori,⁸⁸ while there is very limited research that specifically explores the experiences of takatāpui (LGBTQ+) Māori in relation to te reo Māori. There are therefore important considerations for future research. Similarly, given the majority of Māori youth in this study had limited proficiency in te reo Māori, and predominantly went through English-medium education, these also shape the outcomes of the research. While these narratives reflect the majority of other Māori youth who also have limited proficiency and attend English-medium schools, other research highlights how Māori-medium education disrupts settler colonial thinking through embedding Māori ways of being and knowing, and Māori histories as the foundation for learning.⁸⁹

While there undoubtedly still challenges to the revitalisation of te reo Māori, I remain hopeful. There is an ever-expanding collective of Māori (and non-Māori) who are learning the language and creating contexts in which it can continue to grow and thrive. Including an analysis of settler colonialism within Indigenous language research helps to demonstrate how and where settler colonialism continues to orient Indigenous perspectives on Indigenous languages, and also to highlight community agency in reclaiming their languages as a part of a broader reclamation/revival of Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

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Data statement

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so due to the sensitive nature of the research supporting data is not available.