

## **Submission on Aotearoa New Zealand histories**

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We agree with the proposal to make New Zealand history a core part of the curriculum. We have a rich and fascinating history and all our children should be introduced to it. But we do have serious concerns about elements of the proposal.

**Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories is designed to be taught every year from years 1 to 10, with the same three 'big ideas' repeated and explored each year.** These are

*Māori history is the foundational and continuous history of Aotearoa New Zealand;*

*Colonisation and its consequences have been central to our history for the past 200 years and continue to influence all aspects of New Zealand society;*

*The course of Aotearoa New Zealand's history has been shaped by the exercise and effects of power.*

As someone who loves the study of history, my primary concern is that repeating and exploring the same themes for 10 years is a recipe for boredom and disengagement. Variety is the spice of life. Maori history, colonisation and the effects of power in our country, year in year out, will elicit only groans by years 6 or 7 unless the teacher is a miracle worker.

It's true that when I was at school in the 1980s we studied too little New Zealand history – a bit on Michael Joseph Savage and the rise of social security – but we did delve in to all manner of interesting other histories – the Vikings, Croatia, the development of Apartheid in South Africa are some that I recall.

Ministers have said Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories is not meant to be exclusive, but the demands of doing New Zealand history every year will mean that in some schools little history from the rest of the world – much of which directly shaped ours – will be taught.

If the old ways risked insufficient grasp of our country's history, the proposal risks lurching too far the other way and narrowing our children's view of the world.

At a time when disengagement is common place, history as a subject has the potential to spark the interest of our kids, to have them wanting to learn. It may be the Vikings that do it for some kids; I'm pretty confident a yearly dose of colonisation wont.

**Recommendation:** That there is an explicit expectation that histories from other countries and eras are taught as well as New Zealand history.

**Second, the three 'big ideas' are themselves too narrow.** They don't do justice to our rich and multi-layered history in this country.

Of course, Maori history and the effects and impact of colonisation are massive themes in our history.

But there are other massive themes, like the steady extension of the reach of governments into our lives, from our bank accounts to our bedrooms, for better or worse – or the emergence of a truly national identity independent from Britain – or the need for Kiwis to make a living far from markets, with entrepreneurship and innovation jostling with the ever-present fear of being shut out by protectionist big countries – or the desire to defend the freedoms we have inherited and painstakingly developed from the threats of fascism and communism – or the impact of waves of immigration from a variety of cultures into what has become a melting pot.

There are many big ideas, but year in, year out our students will focus on Maori history and the effects of colonisation.

As for the third idea – *‘The course of Aotearoa New Zealand’s history has been shaped by the exercise and effects of power’* – in combination with the first two themes, this risks rendering our history as a simple division between oppressors and victims.

That’s part of the story, but so is a reflection of what we’ve achieved together – in the creation of prosperity, in the support of those in need, in the expansion and curtailment of our freedoms, in the exuberance and creativity of our emerging New Zealand culture, and so much else.

Our history is rich and fascinating. Let’s keep it broad so that our kids are intrigued, interested and inspired.

**Recommendation:** Either abandon the three ‘big ideas’ or expand them to six or seven so as to include other important themes explicitly.

### **Third, we must avoid over-simplification and a sense of politicisation.**

For example, the draft curriculum states as a key piece of knowledge that students will attain:

‘New Zealand’s settler government and the Crown were determined to undermine mana Maori, especially by acquiring Maori territories’.

What a sweeping statement!

There’s no question that there were times when particular settler governments set out to undermine the mana of particular iwi, particularly during the wars.

But to suggest that it was a consistent, deliberate policy against all Maori by many governments over many decades, is nonsense.

There was, as there is now and will ever be amongst governments, a variety of opinions and motivations, and crucially big gaps between intentions and outcomes.

My experience of government has been that around half the laws Parliament passes today achieve the exact opposite of what was intended. It was no different then. Many laws passed with the intention to protect Maori had the opposite outcome.

The reality of life is always more complex than governments plan for.

To say that a single, consistent thing called the 'settler government' was determined to undermine mana Maori is cynical and simplistic; it sounds more like a political statement.

The risk is that if enough people conclude the curriculum has been politicised, successive governments will feel the need to change it, furthering a sense of politicised curriculum. That is in no one's interest.

**Recommendation:** Dial back the sweeping statements.