

Anchoring educational policy and leadership towards flourishing outcomes for indigenous learners

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What motivates ākonga (learners) to engage, persist, and flourish at school, even when faced with academic and social challenges? How do they navigate choppy seas, and what support systems do they draw on, to reach new horizons? What is the role of educational leadership and policy in enabling successful outcomes for indigenous learners?

Despite well-established links in the literature between student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes, few studies have focused on those for Māori and Pacific ākonga. Also, large scale quantitative and qualitative studies that solely focus on the views of indigenous learners are limited. In response, the COMPASS research programme has examined the ways Māori and Pacific ākonga successfully navigate their way through the schooling system, maintaining positive motivation, academic engagement, cultural connectedness, and high aspirations.

COMPASS was a strengths-based research project that investigated the critical anchors associated with ākonga success, through surveying ākonga ($n = 18,996$), whānau ($n = 6,949$), and teachers ($n = 1,866$) from 102 schools across Aotearoa New Zealand. For this paper, we focused on examining the social-psychological conditions for school success from the perspectives of Māori and Pacific ākonga ($n = 5,843$), their whānau members ($n = 2,027$), and Māori teachers ($n = 311$).

Findings highlighted that Māori and Pacific ākonga success relies on robust networks of support, both in and out of school, along with home-school partnerships that are built on mutual care, respect, and a collective vision for ākonga and their communities. The findings demonstrate that what whānau, teachers and school leaders *value*, *know* and *do* must be strengths-based, ambitious, and contextually tailored to ensure Māori and Pacific ākonga flourish in education. Finally, effective and reflexive teachers who leverage positive relationships, demonstrate high expectations, and seek ongoing opportunities for professional learning and development, are key to transforming the learning trajectories of ākonga.