

# Resourcing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority – Examples from New Zealand

By Ruth Woolven

## Snapshot

Ruth Woolven reports on the results of her research, supported by the SLAV Research Fellowship, into how New Zealand school libraries support their indigenous communities. She makes suggestions for how we can learn from their experience and outlines resources that will support the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures.

I was awarded the SLAV Research Fellowship in November 2019 to consider how New Zealand school libraries support their Indigenous communities and any lessons we could learn to build meaningful collections in our school libraries to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority in the Victorian Curriculum.

In 2015 ACARA stated,

*The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority provides an opportunity for all young Australians to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, knowledge traditions, and holistic world views. (ACARA, 2015)*

I became interested in this topic of the cross-curriculum priority and how we build meaningful collections in our school libraries after the SLAV Primary Conference in 2019 when Shelley Ware, a Yankunyjatjara and Wirangu woman from Adelaide, who is a teacher and broadcaster in Melbourne spoke about the NAIDOC week resources that she had collaborated on. In the questions afterwards some of the conference delegates expressed a lack of confidence in teaching or supporting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority because they lacked appropriate knowledge or feared saying the wrong thing.

In a [speech in November 2019 Ken Wyatt](#), The Minister for Indigenous Australians said:

Truth-telling is not a contest of histories. It's not us versus them, which has too often been used to frame these debates in an educational context. It's not about assigning guilt or blame – it's about understanding our collective and shared history.

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While there is a framework in the national curriculum to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into education, Mr Wyatt said a range of barriers - including 'limited cultural competency' amongst teachers - had hampered its implementation.

In September 2020, [AITSL released a discussion paper \*Indigenous cultural competency in the Australian teaching workforce\*](#) - this discussion was with a group of profession and community stakeholders about impacts, needs and considerations of cultural competency in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. It is insightful with discussion of the language we use, unconscious bias and developing culturally responsive pedagogy.

They identified the following challenges and barriers to having cultural competency:

- fear of offending,
- lack of knowledge,
- competing priorities,
- resistance from other staff,
- time to plan and prepare.

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They concluded that these factors are paralysing and stifling the delivery of Aboriginal content to all students and that while there is a wealth of resources available, teachers find it hard to discern quality resources. Finally, it was found that the development of cultural competence requires collective effort and buy in from school leadership.

From a distance it seemed that New Zealand had well established protocols for inclusion and integration in their education system. I was curious to know what their library staff did to support students, teachers and the curriculum.

My initial research indicated that the National Library of New Zealand provided comprehensive support to schools and demonstrated best practice that could be instructive in the Australian setting. While I had planned to visit the National Library and several school libraries with School Support Co-ordinators, due to the pandemic all my research was conducted virtually.

## New Zealand history

The Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand's founding document. It was first signed on 6 February 1840. The Treaty is an agreement, in Māori and English, that was made between the British Crown and about 540 Māori rangatira (chiefs). The meaning and interpretation of the document in two languages is by no means uncontested particularly the meaning of sovereignty.

But it does mean New Zealand is a bicultural country and government institutions are obliged to

be culturally responsive to the aspirations of Māori and actively innovate solutions to represent and include Māori, particularly to reduce social disparities.

In New Zealand there are two types of school – English language schools which teach varying levels of Maori language and Maori schools (full immersion). There are two separate curricula that reflect these two contexts.

The foundations of curriculum decision making include cultural diversity, inclusion and the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The principles of the Treaty are:

- Partnership – having Maori leaders, engagement, inquiry
- Protection – knowledge, interests, values, normalising Maori, equity
- Participation – positive engagement on all levels

Institutions in New Zealand must embed cultural practice. Both the national library association LIANZA and the school library association SLANZA express a commitment to biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi with LIANZA stating in 1990:

The Treaty of Waitangi places the Maori in a different constitutional position from that of any other ethnic group in Aotearoa. Librarians have a special responsibility to ensure that the needs and aspirations of the Maori people are recognised in their activities.

## National Library of New Zealand

The National Library of New Zealand has a comprehensive Services to Schools program that includes a vast array of resources both physical and digital that they lend out to schools on request, they provide website support and professional development. They have School Support Co-ordinators who visit schools and staff are available to answer any library related question.

They provide the following [selection criteria for selecting Maori resources](#).

*When choosing resources for your library's Maori collection, look for publications in te reo Maori, as well as in the English language about Maori.*

*Try to source materials for each section of your collection, including non-fiction and reference, fiction, picture books and graphic novels, magazines, newspapers and games.*

*Include topics or narratives such as:*

- *Resources in Maori language*
- *Bilingual (Maori/English) editions*
- *Biographies of Maori people*

- *Tribal history and pre-European New Zealand history*
- *History written from a Maori perspective - preference will be given to writers from within Te Ao Māori however those who either hold a strong affiliation, are endorsed by Māori, or have consulted with Māori may also be included.*
- *The Treaty of Waitangi and the Waitangi Tribunal*
- *Stories by Maori authors or featuring Maori characters or stories told from a Maori perspective*
- *Articles and stories featuring Maori contemporary life, experiences, and success.*

They have a similar list for Pasifika resources.

They have an extensive digital collection and buy nearly every resource available.

In 2022, a new element is being added to the curriculum about the New Zealand Wars. This is about battles that have happened since the Treaty was signed but this has not been compulsory in the curriculum previously. The National Library has curated many digital resources and are already providing professional learning including tours of relevant sites. They also expect authors to be writing narrative. A digital copy of a book New Zealand Wars written by Dr Vincent O'Malley is provided to every school by the Ministry of Education.

This topic provides an insight into how language changes and why we need to be mindful of what resources we keep in our collections. These wars were initially known as the Maori Wars because the British tended to name wars after their enemy and gives the impression the Maoris were responsible. In the interest of balance, in the 1960's, historians tried using the term Anglo-Maori Wars. This still wasn't accurate as some Maori fought on the Anglo side and 40% of British troops were actually Irish. They considered just saying Land Wars, but this then pointed the finger at settlers and really the wars were about more than land, they were actually about the future of New Zealand as a whole and so finally settled on New Zealand Wars.

## New Zealand schools

I was very fortunate to make contact with some school librarians who shared their practice. Interestingly, none had specific criteria in their Collection Development policy for resourcing the Maori elements of the curriculum. However, librarian Ellie Nicholson from a large, Catholic boys' school in Wellington stated that cultural competency is included in two ways. First, the overall library policies refer to the Treaty of Waitangi and their responsibilities to it, specifically to take care of Maori taonga (which means object or natural resource that is highly prized), including culture.

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Second, the collection development policy itself directly refers to resourcing to reflect the cultural make-up of the school.

Ellie said:

‘there was a need to balance between making sure that we respect and take care of our unique indigenous culture and also be as inclusive as possible of all our students’ cultures. Which is why I address the importance of the library in preserving and promoting Maori Culture as part of the very top, most overarching section, of the policy documents, because it should be inherent in everything we do. But when it comes to collection development the focus is more on making sure the collection reflects the diversity of the school community so the language used is more around being inclusive of all cultures.’

They look for established reputable authors and avoid self-published authors because they tend to be pushing certain agendas.

Ellie acknowledged that some school libraries keep a separate collection, but she prefers to keep books with their peers with an identifying sticker to encourage participation as a sign of partnership rather than just to show they have an obligatory collection.

In terms of the principle of protection they have created a new collection called New Zealand Reference, finding that the significant number of older New Zealand resources were not encouraging students to see the New Zealand books as vibrant and interesting. However, they did not want to weed them as they are not commonly reprinted and can hold valuable information on Maori culture and perspectives. The books are now kept in a book room but remain searchable on the catalogue and available to be looked at. Resources are still hard to find and that is sometimes why libraries hold on to outdated books.

When it comes to the decision-making process for new items a book by a Maori author, or written in Te Reo, or about Maori culture, resources often don’t have to pass the same standards of price/value for money or potential readership as other books in the collection. The principles of the Te Tiriti O Te Waitangi mean that these resources are taonga as well as practical resources.

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For example, the purchase of Maori translations of popular and important texts. They have few fluent Maori readers on staff, or as students, so the likelihood that these books will be loaned or read is not high. However, it is considered an important part of partnership, protection and participation to have them in the collection. While readership and popularity and usefulness are the commonly understood reasons for purchases in a library there are also books that

“should” be there for other reasons, in this case to fulfil the Treaty. To have Maori translations of Harry Potter or Diary of a Wimpy Kid on the shelves is not about Maori language resources, it’s about having Maori culture represented and valued.

Another perspective came from Fran Mes in a large urban primary school in a growth area in East Auckland which is a school to many immigrants to NZ. The predominant cultures are Chinese and Indian although they do have increasing numbers of Māori and Pacific Islanders. Their library has a Māori name Te Manawa meaning the heart. Fran shared,

We are protecting the Maori stories particularly in our school with its huge immigrant population because if the children who are new to New Zealand don't learn about te reo and tikanga Māori at school from us, where will they learn it?

Fran found in her previous school which had more Maori students that having a genrifed Maori collection increased borrowing significantly.

So slightly varying practices depending on school population and budget, but cultural competency and the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi are embedded in the selection process.

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It is interesting to note that even with extensive support available to schools and more embedded cultural practice, Wendy Macaskill, the National Manager Capability Services for Schools at the National Library, finds teachers and librarians still express a lack of confidence in teaching Maori culture and history.

In Australia there is no treaty with Indigenous peoples and within the Indigenous community there are many different nations and languages. However, these are practices that we can consider and work with to resource the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collections in our libraries.

## Resources

During my research project I discovered many resources that directly support the Australian curriculum or help build cultural competency. I have provided short descriptions and links below.

An article by Anita Brooks Kirkland on the role of school libraries in keeping, sharing and creating relationships with Indigenous people in Canada was an instructive starting point (Synergy, Vol 16, No. 2, 2018).

### [The Truth in Our Stories: Culturally Inclusive and Relevant School Library Learning Commons](#)

The Department of Education and Training provide the following protocols to protect the integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural expressions in a way in which all Australians can engage respectfully and feel connected to this identity.

### [Department of Education and Training - Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and Koorie Protocols](#)

### [How should schools teach Aboriginal Culture](#)

Helen Cowan and Laurie Harper at Edith Cowan Uni wrote an excellent article on assessing and selecting culturally diverse literature which states it is optimal if the resource is written by people of culture reflected in the book, providing potential to increase appreciation and understandings of those not from this culture.

They noted that non-fiction books often contain themes focussed on the more exotic aspects of culture such as celebrations, traditions and traditional stories with little or no portrayal or mention of contemporary life which may promote stereotypical or outdated understandings of diverse cultures.

### **Assessing and Selecting Culturally Diverse Literature for the Classroom**

Schools in Victoria may borrow resources from the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC). The Librarian, Jenny Peck shared her criteria for selecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources. She preferences an Aboriginal author and good quality writing then a non-Aboriginal author and good writing. Resources must also have authenticity, links to curriculum, collaboration of authors, and appropriate permissions and acknowledgement.

### **LMERC Library**

Many bookshops now provide curated lists of First Nation books. Indigenous publisher, Magabala provides teaching notes for their publications.

**<https://www.magabala.com/pages/education>**

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides Tools and Resources to support teaching practice of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross-Curriculum Priority.

### **Selecting Indigenous Resources - Illustrations of Practice**

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Information Resource Network (ATSILIRN) provide protocols as a guideline for best practice for working with Indigenous Australian peoples, content and collections

### **ATSILIRN Protocols**

In 2020, the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature (NCACL) launched a new database of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources.

### **Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander Resource**

A resource available from education publisher Cengage is the Our Land, Our Stories kit which is a series of books, cards and digital content. It was created in consultation with more than 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from around the country. One of the authors, Sally Lawrence, hoped the resource would allay fears some teachers have regarding how to share Indigenous stories appropriately and sensitively in the classrooms.

### **Our Land, Our Stories Resource**

In 2020, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority conducted online professional development on Aboriginal Perspectives in STEM/Art/Geography and these sessions are available to watch.

### **VCAA Professional Development Aboriginal Perspectives in the Victorian Curriculum - Primary & Secondary**

A podcast of a Melbourne Writers' Festival event, [\*Navigating our Future\*](#) discusses the teaching of Australian Literature in secondary schools. The hosts recommend some Indigenous titles that build cultural competency and should be championed. The podcast refers to some recent research.

### [Australian Literature's Great Silence](#)

The Children's Book Council of Australia, NSW Branch, hosted a professional development event in the lead up to NAIDOC Week 2020 celebrating some Indigenous Australian creatives.

### [Preparing for NAIDOC Week](#)

## Conclusion

New Zealand school libraries are expected to maintain a robust and current Maori collection as well as supporting other cultures. In the absence of a structural document like a Treaty, we can use their principles and practice to guide us in resourcing for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross curriculum priority and building collections that respect Indigenous knowledge, culture and stories.

### **Author Note:**

I would like to thank the following people for contributing time and valuable insights to my research – Wendy Macaskill, Julie Wright, Fran Mes, Ellie Nicholson and Jenny Peck.

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