

Submission

By

**THE
NEW ZEALAND
INITIATIVE**

to the Ministry of Education

on

**Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories in the New Zealand
Curriculum Draft for Consultation**

25 May 2021

Prepared by:
Roger Partridge
Senior Fellow
The New Zealand Initiative
PO Box 10147
Wellington 6143
roger.partridge@nzinitiative.org.nz

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This submission in response to the Ministry of Education (**Ministry**) *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories in the New Zealand Curriculum Draft for Consultation*¹ is made by The New Zealand Initiative (the **Initiative**), a think tank supported primarily by chief executives of major New Zealand businesses. In combination, our members employ more than 150,000 people. The Initiative undertakes research that contributes to the development of sound public policies in New Zealand and the creation of a competitive, open and dynamic economy and a free, prosperous, fair and cohesive society.
- 1.2 Over the past decade the Initiative has been an active participant in education policy debate, discussion and formation. A list of our research reports can be found here.² In its 2020 research report, *New Zealand's Education Delusion: How bad ideas ruined a once world-leading school system (Education Delusion)*,³ the Initiative has called for the creation of a new national curriculum based on disciplinary knowledge.
- 1.3 When the Government announced a curriculum change making it compulsory for all schools to teach "key aspects" of New Zealand history, the Initiative cautiously welcomed the development.⁴ As revealed in *Education Delusion*, overwhelming evidence suggests the Ministry's anti-knowledge stance is behind the decline in Kiwi students' educational outcomes over the last two decades.⁵ Consequently, the shift to a knowledge-based curriculum at least for teaching New Zealand history appear a positive development.
- 1.4 Unfortunately, the Initiative considers the Ministry's Draft for Consultation fails to achieve the task delegated to it of creating a new curriculum to "span the full range of New Zealanders' experience... with contemporary issues directly linked to major events of the past."⁶
- 1.5 The Draft for Consultation is not all bad. Its ultimate goal is enabling students to "make an informed ethical judgement about people's actions in the past, giving careful consideration to the complex predicaments they faced, the attitudes and values of the time, and [students'] own values and attitudes."⁷ No one would quarrel with this aim.
- 1.6 Yet few could have predicted the Ministry could have produced such a myopic, loaded and politicised account of New Zealand's history.

2. THE PROBLEM WITH THE FIRST OF THE MINISTRY'S "THREE BIG IDEAS"

- 2.1 Despite the draft curriculum's reference to plural "histories," the curriculum's first of three "big ideas" that all students are expected to understand prescribes a much narrower learning outcome. After 10 years of compulsory study all students are expected to understand that "Māori history is the foundational and continuous history of Aotearoa New Zealand."

¹ <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Aotearoa-NZ-histories/MOE-Aotearoa-NZ-Histories-A3-FINAL-020-1.pdf>.

² <https://www.nzinitiative.org.nz/search-results/?types=publications&subjects=8>

³ <https://www.nzinitiative.org.nz/reports-and-media/reports/new-zealands-education-delusion-how-bad-ideas-ruined-a-once-world-leading-school-system/>

⁴ See, for example, Briar Lipson, *Tiptoeing towards a new National Curriculum*, Insights, The New Zealand Initiative, 4 October 2019.

⁵ The Ministry has disavowed knowledge-based curricula – to the extent that the much-vaunted National Curriculum fits on a scanty 64 A4 pages. It covers the entire social sciences for years 1-13 in a single page: see <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum>.

⁶ <https://gazette.education.govt.nz/articles/new-zealands-histories-to-be-taught-in-all-schools/>.

⁷ <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Aotearoa-NZ-histories/MOE-Aotearoa-NZ-Histories-A3-FINAL-020-1.pdf>, p7.

- 2.2 Precisely what the words “foundational and continuous” mean is not made clear. The pages of most New Zealand history books stretch back millions of years before any human foot stepped on Aotearoa’s shores.
- 2.3 But even ignoring the country’s pre-human history, the “first big idea” is loaded with a second problem: Māori history is not simply “a” foundational history; it is claimed to be “the” foundational (and continuous) history.
- 2.4 Yet the history of a country formed by a treaty signed between two peoples is founded on *two* histories. Indeed, until the arrival of British settlers in the early 1800s, there was no “Aotearoa New Zealand.” Māori were tribal, rather than organised as a nation state.
- 2.5 The “foundational” histories of the new nation that emerged from the signing of the Treaty are the meeting and blending of two histories: those of Māori and the British Crown. Both histories have rich tapestries, with their own mythologies, customs and culture. And both histories have chequered pasts, including injustice, warfare, and slavery.
- 2.6 Since the birth of New Zealand, the country has added its own history to the histories it inherited. For good and for bad. A history of civil war during the 1860s, followed by unjust confiscations by the state from Māori. Of leading the world with the grant of voting rights to women. Of triumph on the sporting field and in the laboratory. Of creating one of the world’s first welfare states (and thereby providing the blueprint for “mother” Britain’s National Health Service). Of consistently ranking in the top echelon of countries for human development, prosperity, economic freedom and freedom from corruption. And of bi-partisan support for settling historical grievances from past injustices to the nation’s first settlers. Along the way, New Zealand’s initial history of biculturalism has been supplemented with a modern history of tolerant multiculturalism.
- 2.7 Māori history is foundational to New Zealand history. But teaching children in 21st century New Zealand that it is “the” foundational history of the nation is simply wrong.

3. THE SECOND AND THIRD BIG IDEAS: COLONIALISM AND POWER

- 3.1 The second and third “big ideas” all children are expected to understand from their 10 years of compulsory history study are also erroneous – or at least exaggerated. The other two ideas are that:
 - Colonisation and its consequences have been central to our history for the past 200 years and continue to influence all aspects of New Zealand life (emphasis added); and
 - The course of Aotearoa New Zealand’s history has been shaped by the exercise and effects of power.
- 3.2 It is true that colonisation is central to New Zealand’s history. That New Zealand is predominantly English-speaking, has a Westminster-style democracy, and a legal system based on English common law is a direct consequence of the treaty signed by Māori chiefs with the British Crown in 1840.
- 3.3 It is also true that colonisation has seen a litany of injustices to Māori. And not just the confiscations of tribal lands. Who could have conceived, for example, that the Crown would assert the right to make planning decisions over iwi landholdings?
- 3.4 All Kiwi children should learn about the confiscation of taonga, harm to iwi institutions and consequential loss of mana these injustices involved.
- 3.5 Yet the notion that “colonisation and its consequences continue to influence “all aspects” of New Zealand society is exaggerated.

- 3.6 There are many aspects of New Zealand society that owe little or nothing to colonisation and everything to human nature and human enterprise: familial love, romantic relationships, the enjoyment of art and culture, friendship, recreation, industry and trade, and even everyday work.
- 3.7 The idea that power structures (above all else) have shaped New Zealand history, with power-wielding “victors” and powerless “victims,” is also flawed. At critical times in New Zealand’s history, power structures have had a profound effect on social justice and social outcomes. And never has this been more true than during the New Zealand Wars and their aftermath.
- 3.8 But the view that sees history as the outcome of struggles for power is predicated on flawed Marxist notions of class warfare. Of different individuals, groups and organisations engaging in a perpetual contest to decide who gets the biggest share of the spoils.
- 3.9 New Zealand’s recent economic history reveals the flaws in this view. Over the last four decades the “spoils” from economic growth show wages rising steadily in line with productivity growth and, at least over the past three decades, the share of income to workers trending upwards. Yet one suspects the framers of the draft curriculum would argue that when the Government of the day abolished compulsory unionism and compulsory collective bargaining in the early 1990s, workers would have been the victims rather than the beneficiaries of these reforms.
- 3.10 New Zealand’s history is much more complex than can be explained by arguments about the exercise and expression of power. It involves a spirit of community and shared values, reinforced by our small size and geographic isolation. It has been shaped by both bold and foolhardy political leadership. It has been buffed and buffeted by world events, including two world wars and periodic global financial shocks. It has been forged on the sports field, in the science lab and elsewhere by great New Zealanders performing on the global stage. And it has been enriched by immigration and multiculturalism.
- 3.11 At significant times in New Zealand’s history, relations between Māori and Pākehā have involved a profound struggle for power. But for all its chequered past, New Zealand’s history has been shaped not just by conflict but by consensus and by a sense of common humanity.
- 3.12 The Draft for Consultation falls so far short of capturing this sense of humanity that it should be rejected, and the drafters asked to start again.

The New Zealand Initiative

25 May 2021