
THE UNIQUE POWER OF
COLLECTIVE ACTION -
A COLLABORATIVE
APPROACH TO CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION:

KŌKIRIHIA (VERB) - TO ADVOCATE, LEAD, RUSH FORWARD, CHAMPION, PROMOTE, TO RISE IN A COLUMN

Led by Tokona te Raki (TTR), the vision for Kōkirihiā is to ensure all tamariki and rangatahi have agency and access to a fair and equitable education. The seeds for the initiative were sown in 2019 as a result of two significant pieces of work TTR was involved in. The first, the publication of *He Awa Ara Rau*; a report utilising BERL data to tell the journey of 100 rangatahi from education into employment, and the barriers that prohibit them from achieving their full potential. Streaming¹ was identified as one of the key factors impacting educational success (Business and Economic Research Ltd [BERL] et al., 2019). At a similar time, a contract with the University of Otago, led to the delivery of Professional Learning Development (PLD) in a Wellington secondary school. What we observed at this school, was Māori student anger about the injustice of streaming, with almost 50 percent of Year 9 Māori students assigned to the ‘cabbage classes’.

Launched in parliament, *He Awa Ara Rau* captured the attention of then Lead technician of Mātauranga Iwi Leaders Group, Dr Hana O'Regan and a then manager at the Ministry of Education (MoE), Tipene Chrisp who in a meeting together, agreed that the issue needed to be addressed. Further, that TTR with its expertise was best placed to lead out on the mahi.

Over the course of the next 12 months, a series of meetings were held with the MoE and in 2020, TTR published [Ending Streaming in Aotearoa](#) – a second

publication on the topic, that showcased positive case studies of secondary school maths classes no longer streaming their students. The MoE provided funding for the printing of this work, and at the same time contracted TTR to lead out on the mission to end streaming in our schools. This work began in 2021 by bringing together a design team to imagine the way forward. Membership at the time included: Anya Pollock (MoE), Rawiri Gibson (NZQA), Professor Christine Rubie-Davies (University of Auckland), Dr David Pomeroy (University of Canterbury), Dr Hana O'Regan (MILG, CORE), Dr Pam O'Connell (CORE), Misbah Sadat (HOD Maths), Grant Congdon (Principal Horowhenua College), Richard Crawford (Principal Fairfield College) and Dr Shannon Walsh (NZEI). Over two years this group met regularly, sharing their wisdom and experience, and dreaming of an alternative future for our tamariki.

Kōkirihiā is viewed as an exemplar for collective impact, significantly increasing TTR's organisational profile. What started out as a design team transitioned into an implementation team which has continued to grow over the past three years to become a 24 member collaboration of sector organisations, all with a strong commitment to our shared outcome. For MoE participants, having TTR facilitate the forum enables them to be active participants. For the academics, it adds authenticity to their research and exposes them to collective wisdom, adding to their teaching, and fostering international interest. This demonstrates Kōkirihiā's success in turning desire into action through collective commitment. Interestingly when we began the journey, our mission was very clear – to end harmful streaming in our schools by 2030. However, over time, despite

having a set definition of what we mean, we have become increasingly aware that the issue isn't black and white – there are many shades of grey, a huge diversity of grouping practices, and a very wide spectrum. Additionally, the deeper we go, the greater our understanding that ending streaming is just one lever of many that must work together to ensure that our tamariki and rangatahi thrive on their education journeys. Therefore in recent times we have been broadening our messaging to be more inclusive of this wider wellbeing thinking – including hauora, equity and fairness.

“I think the hearts and minds of the ringa raupā within our whare have been influenced by the value of what Kōkirihiā represents. It's accessible to everyone and not the few. It is the astute applicability to context in the spaces we work, and it's not limited, and that's a value that Kōkirihiā represents. We, as ringa raupā, are in service and what is of value in Kōkirihiā is what we hear from the people. And that's where the hearts and minds are for our mokopuna.”

¹The term we use in Aotearoa New Zealand to cover harmful fixed-ability grouping, banding, and the inflexible use of prerequisites in education – all practices whereby students are sorted into different classes or placed into in-class ability-based groups for sustained periods of time based on teacher perceptions of ability and assessment data.

METHODOLOGY

As we entered the fifth year of Kōkirihiā, we believed the time was right to we felt it was the right time to prioritise capturing the learning and insights across the rōpū. Being one of the largest and most unique collective impact kaupapa in the education sector in Aotearoa New Zealand we sought to understand through the perspectives and experiences of the group, the overall value of the kaupapa.

With this in mind, in November 2025 using a kaupapa Māori research methodology we set out to gather

the collective insights via focus groups and deep dive interviews. These were carried out both in person, and in some instances online. In total we did four focus groups with a total of 24 participants, and seven interviews. These were transcribed and analysed using qualitative inductive analysis. What follows, is a snapshot of some of the many insights and whakaaro shared across the membership.

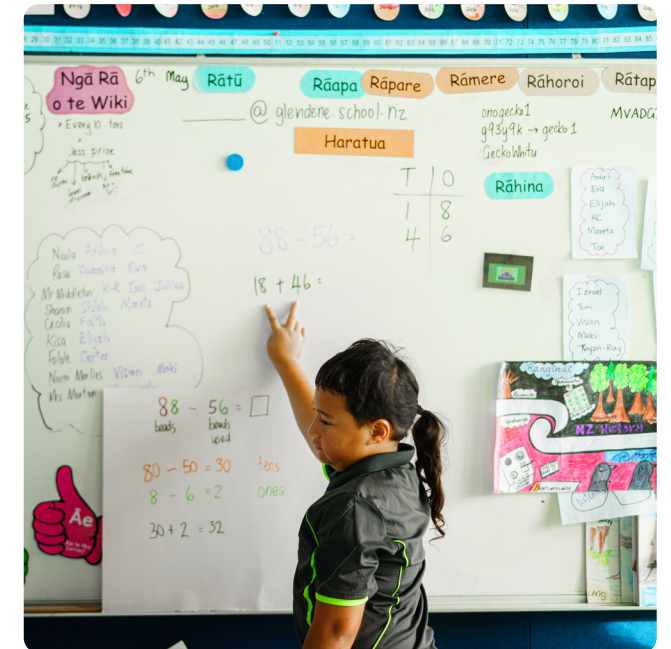
ABOUT TOKONA TE RAKI

[TTR](#) is an indigenous social innovation lab with a focus on designing workable solutions for complex social problems. We do this through collaboration, experimentation and developing innovative solutions and Indigenous frameworks that achieve the change required. We believe in creating inclusive and cohesive communities based on fairness and justice, and recognising the full history that has shaped Aotearoa New Zealand.

Integral to our approach is building strong relationships and processes across all of our kaupapa. Not only do we role model this way of working, but it is inherently baked into our organisational values. The relational safety this approach creates, makes our work unique, and enables participant agency. Further, our facilitation style, use of developmental evaluation, collaborative workshop style, and investment in whanaungatanga and manaakitanga are becoming a part of our unique social innovation toolkit.



“I think it has been incredibly powerful. And a model that I would like to see continue. And then how does that model in some way scale to connect with the ideas you’re talking about of the regional hubs?”



ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS

Key to the success of Kōkirihiā has been our relational approach to building meaningful relationships; taking the time to get to know the individuals behind the organisations. This includes coffee catch ups, 1:1 online hui, visits to organisations, two-day in person hui, regular email updates and bi-monthly pānui. This approach has led to a deeper understanding of what each organisation brings to the table, and the constraints and opportunities they are working with.

Over time Kōkirihiā has built a safe environment in which organisations feel supported to have honest and transparent dialogue. At times it has not been easy, with some organisations having diverse perspectives and varying political constraints. However, increasingly organisations have learnt to trust in us and each other, and to respect the quality of the work we deliver collectively.

“Trust us, trust each other – breaking down the silo’d approach across the sector...see the value of wide-reaching relationships.”

This has led to a number of positive outcomes, including: the brokering of global relationships which are mutually beneficial for the whole collective, and a growing number of collaborations amongst sub-groups of our members as mentioned above.

Further testament to this approach is that, while personnel have come and gone within organisations, the organisations themselves have remained committed to Kōkirihiā.

“The agenda is one of care and manaaki and whakawhanaungatanga more than it is one of a political agenda. And I think that’s what gets people in and keeps people in...”



WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED

Membership of Kōkirihiā has amplified professional projects, and driven a number of outputs and outcomes, both individually and collectively for the kaupapa. This includes research funding, technology developments, research collaborations, workshops and policy developments.

What follows is a summary of key achievements over the past seven years:

PUBLICATIONS:

Kōkirihiā has published: the blueprint for ending streaming, two annual reports, 23 newsletters and developed a purpose built [website](#).

Additionally Tokona te Raki has published three research reports: He Awa Ara Rau (2019) and [Ending Streaming in Aotearoa](#) (2020) and [He au nui, He au ora](#) (2025)

IMPACT:

Greater understanding and awareness of the harms of streaming and accessibility to useful resources.

DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH POLICY:

At its annual conference in 2022, the PPTA passed a remit which brought in a [new policy to end streaming by 2030](#). This policy was heavily influenced by the PPTA's involvement in Kōkirihiā and remains in place, although over time the focus has shifted to include equity.

IMPACT:

Holding educators accountable for ensuring their practice supports equitable outcomes in education for all ākonga.

IWI ENGAGEMENT:

It was important having representation from the Mātauranga Iwi Leaders Group (MILG) at the outset. MILG had a strong voice to ensure we remain focused on equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori.

Over time there has been growing engagement from a number of iwi including:

- Whanganui iwi who have published an education position statement which has at its heart: wellbeing for all in their community and encompasses ending streaming in their rohe.
- Ngāti Kahungunu has produced an education statement to end streaming in schools in their rohe.

IMPACT:

Through engagement with these iwi representatives we have been able to build greater understanding within our membership about the cultural nuances between kaupapa Māori and mainstream education, and the impacts of streaming on many ākonga Māori.

CURRICULUM:

Page 16 of the new draft curriculum includes a statement that grouping practices should be equitable. (Ministry of Education)

Flexible grouping within lessons supports inclusive teaching and learning by aligning grouping and students needs with the purpose of the action. This might include whole-class demonstrations, small group discussions, paired tasks to explain thinking. Providing opportunities for both individual and collaborative work enables students to make choices about when they need to work with others and when they need time and space to work independently. (page 16 Te Mātaiaho)

IMPACT:

Responsibility on teachers to ensure any grouping practice is equitable.

SCHOOL SURVEY:

In partnership with NZEI, PPTA, UC, UoA, TTR has developed a longitudinal survey* designed to build our understanding of the prevalence of streaming. The survey has been conducted twice (2022 and 2024) and is due to be repeated again later in 2026. The survey is disseminated to NZEI and PPTA members.

IMPACT:

Building understanding of the extent of streaming and ability grouping in schools in Aotearoa New Zealand and a gauge teacher perceptions and practices relating to grouping practices.

AAA FRAMEWORK:

The [AAA framework](#) developed as part of the blueprint offering an innovative approach for framing the issues and achieving the desired outcome: Awareness (of the issue), Alternatives (new and different pedagogical methods) and Action (identifying the actions that will create impactful change.)

IMPACT:

A simple, clear and actionable approach that is fully embraced by the collective.

WAITANGI TRIBUNAL CLAIM:

NZEI Te Riu Roa is supporting a claim by Ngāti Hine and Te Kapotai for an urgent Waitangi Tribunal inquiry into the government's decision to remove legal obligations for school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This contravenes Section 127 of the Education Act which states that schools should be inclusive. Its removal will negatively impact the ability of schools to ensure equitable outcomes and inclusivity for ākonga Māori.

IMPACT:

A powerful collective message to the government voicing opposition to the removal of the Te Tiriti clause.

TEACHING RESOURCES:

Kōkirihiā members representing five ITE organisations (Waikato University, University of Canterbury, Otago University, University of Auckland and Massey University) came together to develop a resource for training teachers: [Tātau](#) [Tātau: Grouping for Equitable Outcomes in Aotearoa](#) designed to build greater understanding of the issues with harmful fixed ability/streaming pedagogy, and to elevate teacher practice.

IMPACT:

An opportunity to distribute an impactful resource widely and inform the thinking of trainee teachers.

“And I think what Kōkirihiā has done is help connect those pockets that do feel that they were working in isolation to find networks that they didn't have before, and that's just continued to grow with the big workshops that you guys have facilitated and the unions have facilitated...”

WHY KŌKIRIHIA HAS BEEN SO SUCCESSFUL

As a learning organisation, Developmental Evaluation (DE) is an embedded practice across all TTR mahi. As a learning tool it supports us to regularly sense-check our approach, and to adapt when and if required to enable us to achieve our outcomes. In the case of Kōkirihiā, DE has helped us to identify our successes and challenges, and to pivot when needed to remain on track with our goal of ensuring all ākonga are thriving, and achieving their full potential on their education journeys.



THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE:

The impact we have generated over the last seven years demonstrates the power of the collective. The shared determination to drive positive change is far greater than what the individual organisations could achieve alone.

“Yeah, just that keeping us back on track, bringing us together, providing this space for us to stop and think and stocktake.”

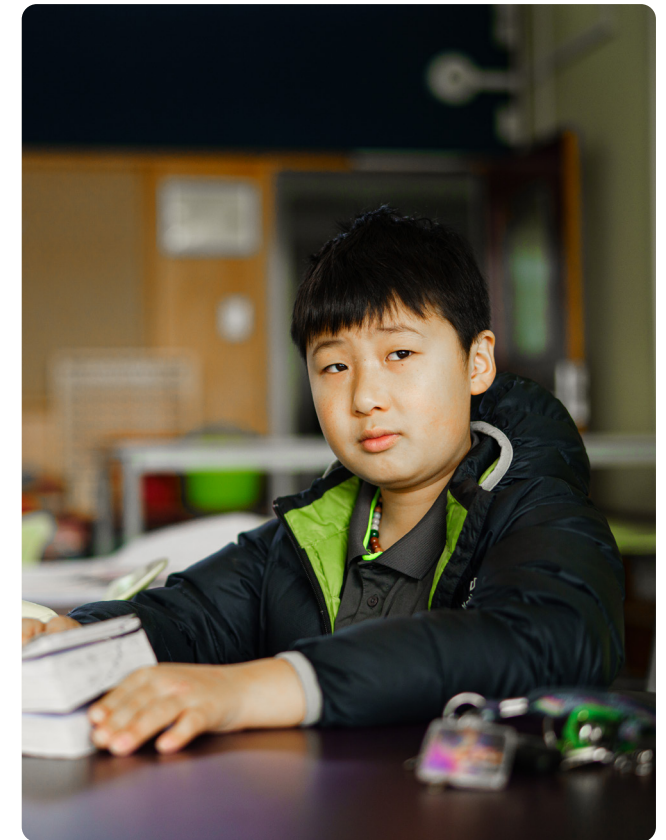
TAKING TIME TO BUILD TRUST:

Building awareness and trust has taken time to develop. We have grown to understand that meaningful change starts with shifting hearts and minds, and while it takes time, it is key to achieving our ultimate goal of ending streaming by 2030.

SETTING BOUNDARIES:

As passionate individuals, we are often tempted to over-extend ourselves. We have learnt over time however, the importance of setting boundaries regarding the role of the backbone organisation, and having realistic expectations about what we can deliver with the resources we have available. As a collaboration, we bring a diverse range of skills and we recognise that the role of TTR in this is to co-ordinate and facilitate the membership.

“Safe place, weathering of the storm . . . share frustrations, cultivates bravery, they feel we have their best interest at heart - ability to have the tough conversations with each other - culture of vulnerability.”



CHALLENGES

DEEP-SEATED SYSTEMIC AND IDEOLOGICAL RESISTANCE:

Kōkirihiā is constantly navigating deep-seated ideological and political resistance. This is compounded by political shifts to the right and ideological curriculum counter pressures.

“... but we just can’t respond to everything, and the approach this government has taken is overwhelming and random; being blind slided constantly, and there’s things that we just have to respond to and have to do it very fast, and so there are just days and weeks when you just drop everything you’re doing and you have to respond...and knowing that you’re not gonna be listened to anyway, but something is better than nothing.”

IMPACT AND POLITICAL HEADWINDS:

We had not foreseen the political headwinds we are currently facing. Making positive change in a tumultuous landscape is a challenge, however, our enduring relationships with all member organisations ensures we stay strong and committed to our end goal.

“I think some of the policy things that are happening at the moment are giving permission for people to put their head in the sand.”

BARRIER OF INERTIA AND LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY:

We understand government bodies must “walk a fine line” in responding to political changes. This has resulted in some organisations being hamstrung to fulfill their aspirations for the kaupapa, however, they still remain committed.

COMPLEXITY:

At the outset, Kōkirihiā created a definition of streaming for the purpose of the kaupapa. Over time we have learnt that there is no universal consensus of the meaning of the term. We started out by talking about ending streaming, yet streaming and/or ability grouping is very nuanced. While harmful fixed ability grouping/streaming is detrimental we understand that there is a continuum of mixed and flexible ability grouping practices that are useful when used in certain contexts.

CHALLENGES OF THE GROUP:

Kōkirihiā is a collective of organisations, all committed to contributing human resource, sector expertise and time to the kaupapa. For a number of our members it has been quite a challenge managing competing priorities (time, workload, accountability) but due to their continued passion and commitment, to the kaupapa they remain wholeheartedly onboard.



CONCLUSION

Interestingly, despite the plethora of global research evidencing the harm of the practice, Aotearoa New Zealand still has one of the highest rates of streaming in the world according to the 2022 OECD Pisa Report. Over generations it has been so intricately woven into the fabric of our education system, to the point where it now occurs without question.

Kōkirihiā started out as a compelling insight dropping out of He Awa Ara Rau. Five years on it has become a widely recognised, respected and powerful agent of systems change.

We are grateful to our funders for supporting and believing in our kaupapa. We have come so far, but there is still a long way to go. This is a much longer journey than we originally anticipated. As a collective, we have grown AWARENESS and we have gathered a body of evidence relating to ALTERNATIVES and potential ACTION (our triple A framework).

We remain 100% committed and believe we have a collective responsibility in ensuring all of our tamariki and rangatahi have agency and are empowered to fulfill their dreams and aspirations for their futures – they are our future! To fund social innovation is a key part of our change story and it will be key to the future. Fundamental to our ongoing success will be our ability to continue to innovate, learn and respond to our rapidly changing environment. Alongside this, we will continue to build our body of knowledge, research and evidence and most importantly maintain the strong relationships built within the collective that have been a catalyst in getting us to where we are. Achieving our ultimate goal is the work of many. It requires both system

shifts (policy change) and social shifts (relationship building and story telling that impacts hearts and minds.)

“And as you said at the very beginning, it’s personal to everyone. For one reason or another, if it’s not your own education journey, it’s something that’s happened to your kids or your nieces and nephews or your parents or whatever. Everyone has a personal connection to it. So we need to use it.”

“Yeah, one of the real strengths I spoke about yesterday with Tokona te Raki is the independence that is held here and then the ability to bring together the research community, the PLD community, the government agencies, the peak bodies and there have been several times where people have gone Wow, this doesn’t happen anywhere else.”

“We’ve somehow grown rather than shrunk. Despite changing government, despite policies coming out left, right and centre at different places, we’ve somehow kept together.”



GLOSSARY

ĀKONGA	Student
AOTEAROA	New Zealand
HAUORA	Health, wellbeing
HUI	Meeting
IWI	Tribe
KAUPAPA	Principles, plan, idea
KAUPAPA MAORI	Māori Research Methodology
MAHI	Work
MANAAKI	Support, care
MANAAKITANGA	Hospitality, taking care of
MĀNA MOTUHAKE	Self determination
MĀORI	Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
MĀTAURANGA	Knowledge, education
PĀNUI	News
RANGATAHI	Youth
RINGA RAUPĀ	Hard working, calloused hands from hard work
ROHE	Area
RŌPŪ	Group
TAMARIKI	Children
TE TIRITI O WAITANGI	Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document

GLOSSARY

TIRITI	Treaty
WHAKAWHANAUNGATANGA	Relationship building
WHAKAARO	Thoughts, ideas
WHĀNAU	Family
WHĀNAU ETHICS	refer to a set of Māori ethical principles and values centered on the collective wellbeing, relationships and responsibilities of the whānau (extended family or collective) group. ‘
WHANAUNGATANGA	Relationship, kinship, sense fo family connection, a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging.

For further information please email streaming@ngaitahu.iwi.nz

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