



MAI
WORLD

Child
AND
Youth
VOICES

Child and youth voices on their positive connections to culture in Aotearoa

Engaging children and young people
in matters that affect them

September 2017

Mai World Child and Youth Voices Report

#maeworld #koreromai #beheard



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's
Commissioner



About the Office of the Children's Commissioner

The 1.1 million children and young people under 18 make up 24% of New Zealand.

The Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft and his office advocate for their interests, ensure their rights are upheld, and help them have a say on matters that affect them.

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Positive connections to culture in Aotearoa



*-Young person,
survey response*



Culture is an important part of who we all are. It gives us a sense of belonging, that others share our values and beliefs, to know who we are and where we come from.

Culture includes all the customs, practices, languages, values and world views that define our social groups – whether those are based on nationality, ethnicity, region or common interests.

We know cultural identity is important for people's sense of self, belonging and how they relate to others. A strong cultural identity can contribute to people's overall wellbeing. For children and young people, developing a positive cultural identity is linked to protective factors against risks to their wellbeing, and resilience from adverse situations.

Despite knowing cultural identity and belonging is important, we know very little about how young people understand, value and express their culture. So we asked them.

We wanted to hear how children and young people feel about their culture when they have positive connections to it.

The Children's Commissioner, Judge Andrew Becroft, has set five key priorities to guide his work in 2017. These include improving outcomes for tamariki and rangatahi Māori, providing the best possible advice to ensure the new care and protection and youth justice system under Oranga Tamariki is child-centred, and encouraging other Government agencies and NGOs to better consider children. Understanding the ways that positive connections to their culture enhance the lives of children and young people will help to advance each of these priorities.

The Children's Commissioner seeks the voices of children and young people through **Mai World: Child and Youth Voices**

During 2017, we have sought the views of over 1000 children and young people on their positive connections to culture.

"Mai World" takes a child-centred approach to hearing children and young people in order to understand their world.



In order to learn about children and young people's positive connections to culture, we asked them

Children and young people are experts about their own experiences.

As the Office of the Children's Commissioner we have a responsibility to promote the participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them. This is a right that they have under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (The Children's Convention). The Children's Convention is an international human rights treaty that sets out the basic rights of children and the obligations of governments to fulfil them.

Through *Mai World: Child and Youth Voices* we endeavour to model best practice for engaging with children and young people. We have agreements with more than 54 schools around the country to undertake regular online surveys and focus groups to find out what their students think about issues of importance to them. As part of that project we also employ a dedicated community engagement specialist who engages with children and young people through focus groups in communities and at youth events. We use what we learn to inform our own work and that of other Government agencies.

WE ENGAGED WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN A MYRIAD OF WAYS

We designed a multi-stage approach. The first stage of engagement was through in-person engagement and activities at Polyfest. This in turn informed the second stage of online in-school surveys that gave a large number of young people the chance to express their views on culture. We also did face-to-face surveys and engagement with tamariki and rangatahi Māori at a marae event.

In total, we engaged with over 1000 children and young people about culture.



What children and young people told us about their connections to culture

Children and young people told us that their culture was important to them. They told us who connected them to their culture, what was special about it, and what they wished others knew about it.

They contributed these insights through a range of engagement, including: voting polls, surveys, one-on-one interviews and group discussions. The young people could opt in to all activities, and not every young person took part in every activity.

The majority of children and young people at Polyfest were Pacific or Māori, and the majority of respondents to the survey identified as Pākehā.

The majority of our participants were positively engaged with their culture, therefore the insights gathered reflect their experiences. Separate engagement carried out by our team with young people who are less positively engaged with their culture has highlighted different insights to those presented in this report. We will be reporting on those soon.

Key insights from children and young people who are positively engaged with their culture

- 1) My culture is a big part of who I am (and I wish I knew more about it)
- 2) My school supports me to have pride in my culture (but it could do more)
- 3) I can celebrate and express my culture most at home
- 4) My family connects me most with my culture
- 5) My culture is not well understood by the general public

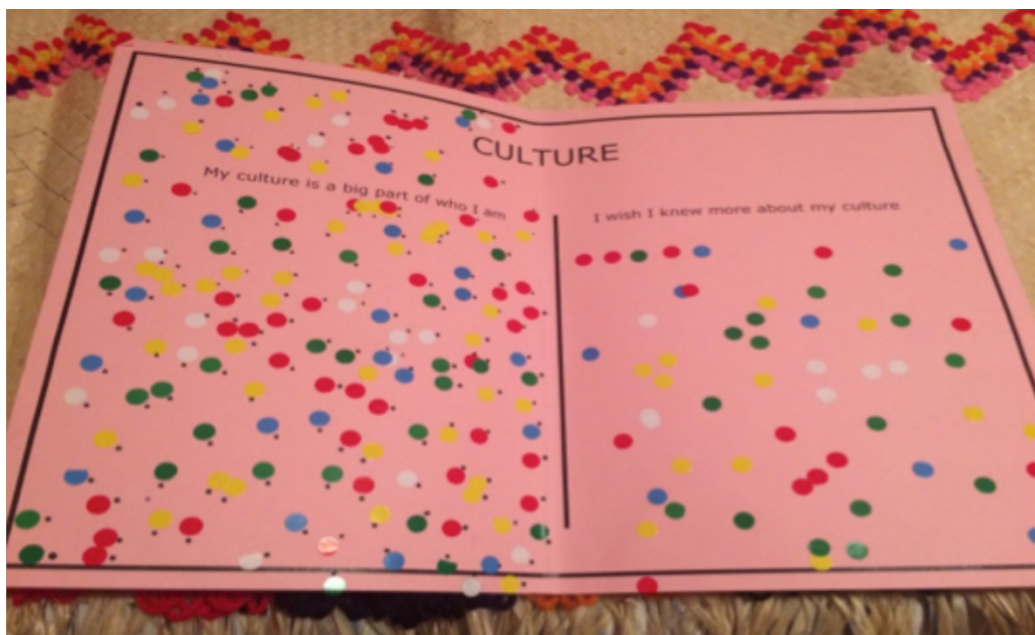
INSIGHT ONE: MY CULTURE IS A BIG PART OF WHO I AM (AND I WISH I KNEW MORE ABOUT IT)

This insight was gathered from children and young people at Polyfest.

My culture is a big part of who I am

One of the purposes of Polyfest was to celebrate Polynesian culture. This meant that the majority of the young people that we met there were positively engaged in their culture, or in one of the cultures of New Zealand. This key insight came from a group of positively engaged young people, we cannot generalise what they have said for all children.

Three quarters of the 225 children and young people who completed a spot poll at Polyfest indicated that their culture was a big part of who they were, and the remaining 25% indicated they wished they knew more about their culture.



Without prompting, young people described the place that family has in their cultural identity. They said "My grandparents gave it to me, and I want to give it to my kids".

They talked about how their culture was something that they shared with their family - "My culture is my family because it's one of the things we all share together".

One young person who strongly identified with their culture said "I don't know what it would be like not to have my culture, it's fun and it's awesome".

Another talked about the festivities associated with culture, saying "when I think about culture I think straight away about food and dancing".



More than five young people who identified as Māori and completed our survey at Polyfest said that culture meant “everything” to them; another young person said that “my culture means everything! It’s my background, my heritage and basically my heart!”. During the hang out spaces the majority of young people responded positively to statements about culture. Most believed that they are able to represent and share their culture, and they expressed great pride in being a Pacific or Māori young person. Some felt that the Polyfest was the only real place in New Zealand where all other cultures embraced Pacific cultures and this made them feel good. A few felt that Polyfest was great but after it was finished there weren’t many other events or places which celebrated their culture and that there should be.



I wish I knew more about my culture

Polyfest gave the young people an avenue to explore Pacific and/or Māori culture. Yet some young people wished they could choose to celebrate their own culture, rather than the ‘main’ ones - “You can choose to learn all these other languages and cultures but you can’t choose like Tokelau or Tuvalu”. One young person had performed for a different culture than their own, and wished they knew more about theirs - “I performed on the Niue stage but that’s not my culture, I wish I knew more about my own”.

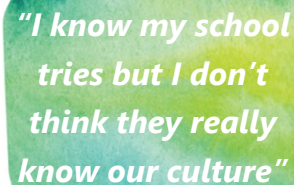
Wanting to know more was a very common theme among the young people - “It’s my first time here and it’s amazing, but it makes me think about what I don’t know”.

Young people wanted to be able to explore their culture more deeply, and increase their understanding “we do a lot of dancing and stuff but we never really learn about what it means”. For some young people, a lack of knowledge about their own culture, made learning about other cultures uncomfortable. In one focus group during Polyfest, languages in school were discussed with specific reference to learning Te Reo Māori. One young person expressed discomfort about learning another language, when they couldn’t speak their own.

INSIGHT TWO: MY SCHOOL SUPPORTS ME TO HAVE PRIDE IN MY CULTURE (BUT COULD DO MORE)

This insight was gathered from children and young people at Polyfest.

Over 60% of the 225 children and young people who responded to a spot poll indicated that their school supports them to have pride in their culture, but almost 40% said that their school could do more to support them to explore their culture.



"I know my school tries but I don't think they really know our culture"

Given the nature of Polyfest, most young people present were supported by their school to be there, which indicates that their school encourages them to celebrate their culture to some extent. There was a range of insights from young people - "bro are you kidding, my school is all about culture and knowing where you came from" to "sometimes it feels all we do is just dance and stuff but what about the real stuff" and then "I know my school tries but I don't think they really know our culture".

Many young people also felt that it was very important that young people get to learn about their culture in school, as important as other subjects because it was part of their identity. Some young people shared that they believed racism still existed, as well as rivalries between Pacific groups, but that this was because of other factors such as poverty rather than culture.





INSIGHT THREE: I CAN CELEBRATE AND EXPRESS MY CULTURE MOST AT HOME

This insight was gathered from mainly Pākehā children and young people through an online, in-school survey, and supported by children and young people at Polyfest.

Out of the 300 young people who responded to the question in our school survey on culture, more than 70% indicated that they felt they could express their culture most at home.

This finding aligned with what young people shared through their survey answers at Polyfest. Young people acknowledged through face to face conversations that racism still existed and that they still saw rivalries between Pacific groups, although they attributed that to other factors such as poverty rather than culture.



Despite Polyfest being a place to celebrate culture, where we expected to meet young people who were engaged in their cultures, we met some young people who did not feel that way about their culture. One young person told us that they “Don’t have any culture” with another sharing that “I don’t celebrate my culture”.

When asked how they like to celebrate their culture one young person said “in my mind” and another said “when I’m alone with no one to judge me”.

Additionally, many Māori young people identified a significant omission in our survey questioning. We had neglected to include marae as an option. Young people chose other and responded with marae as the place that they connect with their culture, through the comment box.

INSIGHT FOUR: MY FAMILY CONNECTS ME MOST WITH MY CULTURE

This insight was gathered from mainly Pākehā children and young people through an online, in-school survey, and supported by children and young people at Polyfest.

This insight was also supported by Māori children and young people who we engaged through a marae event. They also added that food was also an important thing that connected them to their culture.

Four fifths of the 300 respondents to the in-school survey question indicated that they connect most with their culture through family. This insight is consistent with Insight Three, that children and young people express their culture most at home. Other things that young people identified as connecting them to their culture were sport, food, god, customs, the internet, yearly festivals and performances.



Second to family connecting young people to their culture were friends. This is an important insight, given the influence of peer affiliations on adolescents.

When asked “What is the one thing that you feel most connects you to your culture?” responses to our survey at Polyfest replied with “family”, “Mum and Dad”, “meeting new family members that you never knew about”, “my family, my language and my identity” and “tikanga and just whanau”. Responses from Māori children and young people through the online survey strongly indicated that kapa haka connected them to their culture.

Māori young people at Polyfest also identified their family as the thing that made them proud of their culture.

INSIGHT FIVE: MY CULTURE IS NOT UNDERSTOOD BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Children and young people had very clear messages about what they would like others to know about their culture. Many of their comments and opinions shared the belief that others didn’t understand their culture.

“That it is beautiful and I am honoured to be able to represent my country and culture”

Things I wish people knew about my culture:

"That we were the first to discover New Zealand"

"We don't all teach or support terrorism"

"All cultures are beautiful and unique"

"I like to find out about other cultures. Everyone is free to express their own culture (I know this doesn't answer the question but still...)"

"It is my own and not to be underestimated"

"That all people should be treated the same no matter what race"

"Bagpipes aren't everything to us"

"I have many cultures. They have rich history and I can trace my ancestors quite far back."

"That my culture is important"

"He whanau kotahi tatou, he kaupapa rangatira e kui ma, a koro ma"



Implications of what we heard from children and young people about culture

We have heard from children and young people that culture is important to them. We have analysed the key insights from young people and identified the implications for our OCC work and the sector.

The implications of what we heard are that

1. Children and young people's voices can inform government decisions on culture, as they identify it as a big part of who they are
2. A continued focus on improving children and young people's knowledge and pride in their culture could contribute to good Education policy and practice.
3. There are further opportunities for communities to foster and appreciate cultures, so that young people feel free to celebrate theirs
4. The insight that it is family that connects children and young people most can support informed policy and practice guidelines
5. Children and young people want to be asked about decisions that affect them, and have important contributions that can inform decisions

WHAT WE WILL DO WITH WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

The Children's Commissioner and his Office are committed to hearing children and young people's opinions and views, and using what we learn to inform Office work and priorities.

We will apply the insights from children and young people in our work programme.

Our priority area for Rangatahi Māori

Better supporting Rangatahi Māori is one of the Children's Commissioner's top five priorities for 2017. Our work on this priority will be strengthened by what we have heard from children and young people on culture. The integral place of culture in a child or young person's identity must be central to any work for Māori children and young people.



Our role as an advocate for children and young people

The voices that we have heard through this engagement have aligned with the message that culture is important to children and young people. For the Children's Commissioner to advocate well for New Zealand children, he will need to ensure that their cultural diversity and identity is recognised, respected, considered and embraced.

Promoting these key insights across the children's sector

Our work to promote child-centred thinking across the children's sector will be informed by the insights of the children and young people on culture. The particular insight from some children and young people that their family connects them most has reinforced a need to understand children in the context of their family and whānau. We will be sharing the relevant insights with government agencies, so that the information is available and can inform policy and practice.

Promoting the insights with schools

For schools, the insights shared by children and young people can be a valuable tool to improve opportunities for cultural connectedness. We have reported these insights back to the schools that participated.

Supporting children and young people to develop positive cultural identity

We will continue to encourage schools to support children and young people to have pride in their culture.

Children and young people told us that their schools generally do this very well, but that they would like to delve deeper into their cultural identities. They acknowledged the presence of kapa haka, dance, music and food, but wanted schools to move beyond these things and more deeply understand and explore their cultures.

Cultural engagement needs to be done carefully and respectfully. Through other engagement that we have done with children and young people who are less connected to their culture we have learned that young people feel more or less comfortable engaging in cultural activities based on the strength of their connection (often from family and home life). If young people don't feel they are connected to their culture, celebrating it at school can reinforce a feeling of disconnection and shame for not knowing about it already. This demonstrates that cultural engagement needs to be sensitive to the circumstances of each child or young person, so that the experience is positive for them.



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By working with schools and community groups, we provide a way for children and young people to contribute their views so they can be heard by a range of audiences, and their voices can influence government and community decisions that they care about and that may affect them.

Register your school or community group at
www.surveymonkey.com/r/voicesreg



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