



## Navigating the Winds of Change: A Reflection on Local Curriculum Implementation on the Remote Chatham Islands, New Zealand

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The Chatham Islands, a territory 800 km away from mainland New Zealand (Figure 1), embodies a unique culture and a rich historical past. As a teaching principal entrusted with implementing a newly designed local curriculum in New Zealand's second-most remote school in collaboration with the other two schools on the islands, I embarked on a journey filled with challenges and opportunities for transformative education. In this teacher reflection, I reflect on the local curriculum on the Chatham Islands, analysing the complexities, successes, and lessons learned along the way.

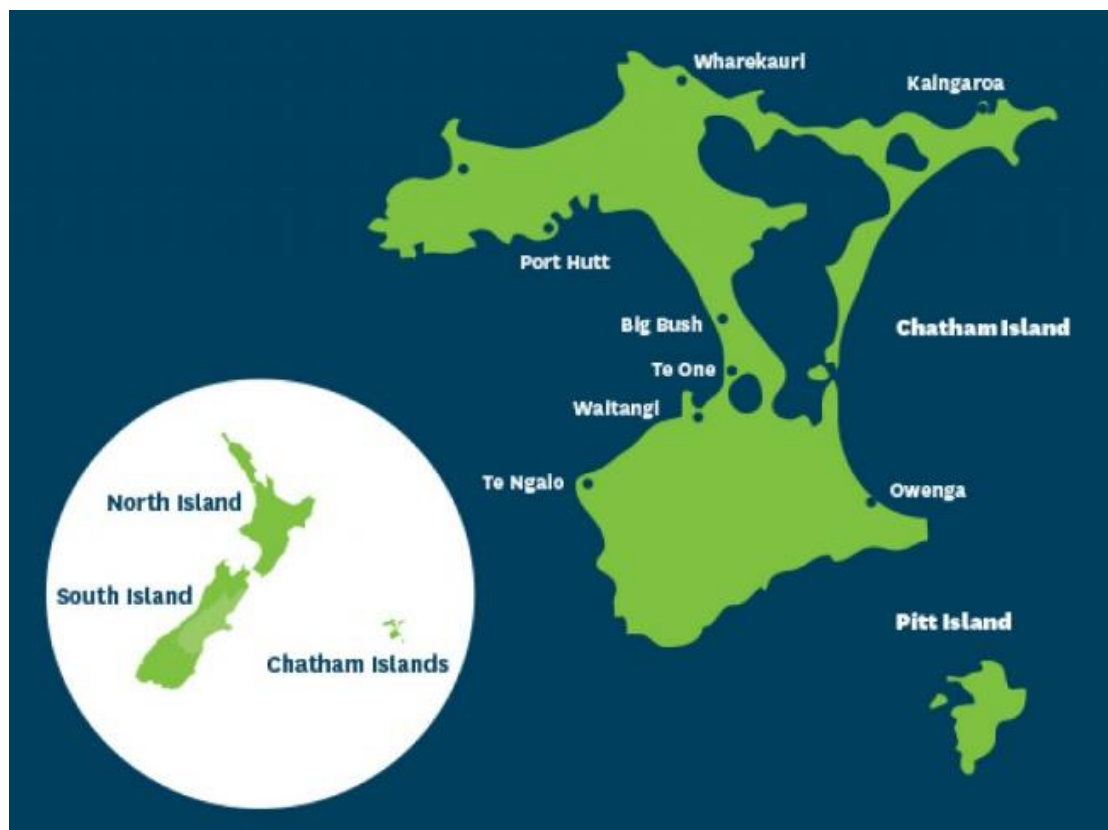


Figure 1: Chatham Islands

The cornerstone of our local curriculum development was the celebration and preservation of the Chatham Islands' rich culture and historical heritage. Our engagement with the local imi, iwi, whānau, and community, who played an important role, was instrumental in providing invaluable insights into traditional knowledge, customs, and language (Hipkins, et al., 2023). The curriculum, in turn, became a living testament of meaningful teaching and learning, weaving traditional Moriori and Māori practices into classroom activities and incorporating local legends, Mātauranga Māori [Māori knowledge], tikanga [customs], language and local history stories into different learning areas. This process helped students connect with their roots and fostered a deeper appreciation and understanding of the diversity that defines their community (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). It also provided a platform for students to reflect on the relevance of traditional knowledge in the 21st century, particularly around issues such as environmental protection (Cowie & Otrell-Cass, 2011).

## **NAVIGATING EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN THE MOST REMOTE SCHOOL IN NEW ZEALAND**

Implementing a local curriculum in a remote, geographically isolated setting was complex. Regular meetings with principals from other schools to collaborate, maximise resources, and develop a community of learners posed challenges in many aspects. The lack of collaboration among schools, stemming from differences in leadership skills and styles, was a significant problem. The varying views on the essence of the local curriculum and its delivery among the islands' educators, the lack of meaningful engagement and consultation with local communities, and poor pedagogical leadership further complicated the curriculum implementation process.

Despite the challenges, I decided to face those barriers and take the initiative by implementing innovative and evidence-based strategies, such as place-based education (Penetito, 2013; Smith, 2012) and project-based learning (TKI, 2024) at Kaingaroa School, to support curriculum delivery. These two approaches provided the tools to embrace and weave The Treaty of Waitangi as part of our everyday teaching and learning, making it visible throughout the school and simultaneously addressing The Refreshed NZ Curriculum (Te Mātaiaho, n.d). The two approaches emerged as catalysts for meaningful learning experiences, fostering students' sense of belonging and empowerment.

### **Fostering Collaboration**

A successful local curriculum development requires educators to possess capabilities beyond traditional teaching skills. These include cultural competence, adaptability, collaboration, reflective practice, leadership, and strong pedagogical skills (Ministry of Education, n.d; Te Kete Ipurangi, n.d.; Hipkins, Cowie, Tolbert & Waiti, 2023). Working with local stakeholders, curriculum advisors, cultural experts, and environmental guardians, Kaingaroa School co-created a curriculum that addresses the aspirations and values of the Chatham Islands communities, specifically the Kaingaroa community. Engaging in environmental conservation projects such as the One Billion Trees – a governmental project across New Zealand (Ministry for Primary Industries, n.d.),

learning about Moriori traditional musical instruments and the local histories at the local museum, hosting national and international scientists to share their projects on the island with the school, learning about the local economy, environmental issues and its impact on local economy and community wellbeing through Māori knowledge lens and Western perspectives (Smith, 2012; Cowie & Otrell-Cass, 2011); the curriculum served as a bridge between the classroom and the community, nurturing a sense of collective responsibility, stewardship and citizenship among students. It also contributed positively to behaviour management, enhanced social and emotional competencies and supported positive academic outcomes (Durie, 2001).

As I reflect on the journey of Kaingaroa School's local curriculum development on the Chatham Islands, I am reminded of the transformative power of education to transcend boundaries and ignite a passion for lifelong learning. Witnessing students' excitement in learning through meaningful curriculum, they discovered their cultural identity, engaged with their surroundings, developed transferrable skills to other contexts, and embraced their role as guardians of their heritage (Education Review Office, 2011). This reaffirmed my belief in the impact of locally relevant education. While the road ahead may be filled with challenges, the winds of change promise a brighter future for the students of the Chatham Islands.

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, developing a local curriculum on the Chatham Islands is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and spirit of collaboration that define our profession. As educators navigate the winds of change, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to empowering students, nurturing cultural pride, fostering community connections through education, and promoting citizenship. In every challenge lies an opportunity for growth, and in every reflection lies the seeds of transformation.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Rodrigues-Tiago holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and Portuguese from PUC Minas, Brazil, and has furthered her education in New Zealand with a Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood Teaching and a Master's in Educational Leadership from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Additionally, she holds a Graduate Diploma in Primary Teaching from the University of Canterbury. Rodrigues-Tiago is an experienced educator and leader, passionate about fostering inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments. With a deep commitment to curriculum development and community engagement, she led numerous initiatives that integrate sustainability, Mātauranga Māori, and innovative pedagogical practices. Currently pursuing PhD research, her focus lies in bridging global educational models with local contexts to empower diverse learners and communities.

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