

Destreaming literacy

A guide for primary school educators

Grow
Waitaha



He mihi | Acknowledgements



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He mihi tēnei ki a Tokona te Raki, nā koutou tēnei kaupapa i hāpai kia puāwai ai. Ki ngā kaipānui katoa - tēnā koutou!

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Grow Waitaha is a multi-year project to support schools in post-earthquake greater Christchurch through citywide educational transformation.

We welcome ongoing feedback on how you have used this resource and what suggestions you would like to contribute. Please email:

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He whakamahuki | About this guide

Ko toko nā wai? Ko toko nā Ruatipua
Ko toko nā wai? Ko toko nā Ruawhito

He turuturu, he pīnaki, he papare, he aitutonga
Tēnā toko, tokotoko ka eke, ko toko o tēnei raki

Quoted by Tokona Te Raki as part of their pūrākau | narrative, this proverb highlights that “the challenge (is) to raise the ceilings of possibility and create the conditions for new light and potential to emerge” – this is what the organisation strives for in their work.

With their renowned work towards destreaming, Tokona Te Raki has supported the development of this resource and together, we have set our sights on ways to support kaiako to learn, upskill and make changes in their practice.

We want our ākonga to...

have equitable opportunities to learn and participate in stimulating, challenging, and engaging activities.

All ākonga deserve kaiako who have high expectations of them, and support and empower them to learn and achieve personal excellence.



Use this guide to inform kōrero / talanoa / discussions as you collaboratively plan literacy learning in your school.

THIS GUIDE:

- + Provides a range of strategies to support you to destream literacy
- + Supports you to use different approaches to grouping ākonga
- + Enables you to use a range of teaching strategies to engage, motivate, and empower ākonga towards literacy achievement

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Why streaming is harmful

Aotearoa New Zealand has one of the highest ability grouping rates of any OECD country, and one of the widest disparities between our highest and lowest achievers.

Most kaiako were educated in a streamed academic system, and trained within and entered a profession where streaming was the norm.

At the start of primary school, ākonga are placed into harmful fixed-ability groups for subjects such as maths and reading. Once in these groups, whether it be the top or bottom group, this is where they are likely to stay for the remainder of their primary and secondary education – a child's career path and future life opportunities are frequently determined by the age of five.

SOURCE AND FURTHER READING:

[Streaming in schools decides futures at age five, Christine Rubie-Davies, University of Auckland](#)

Māori and Pacific learners are more likely to be wrongly allocated to lower ability groups and streams because group placement is often not solely based on prior achievement but also assumptions about ethnicity, socio-economic background, gender, and disability.

Research indicates that flexible adaptive approaches to differentiating instruction benefits all learners and mitigates the risks of streaming. Groups should be flexible, changing with learners' variable confidence with concepts, responses to instruction, interests, motivations, and social connections.



SOURCE AND FURTHER READING:

[Does streaming work? A review of the evidence, He Whakaaro | Educations Insights, Ministry of Education.](#)



Kaupapa Māori and literacy

When early settlers arrived, they brought written text with them. Māori were quick to learn how to read and write and some of the early forms of written language in te reo Māori were from the translation of the Bible from English to Māori.

Rates of literacy among Māori were high and literacy was highly valued. By the end of the 1800s Māori had bought printing presses and were publishing newspapers in te reo Māori.

Literacy continues to be a valuable tool to capture mātauranga Māori and extend its reach through digital and emerging technologies. Values that are embedded in te ao Māori continue to support literacy learning, for example, the way that whanaungatanga, pūrākau, and whakapapa inform the writing of waiata and mōteatea, and how te reo Māori is exemplified in events such as regional and national Ngā Manu Kōrero and kapa haka. This involves much collaboration and organising, and represents the effort of kaiako, whānau and ākonga to maintain the wellbeing of te reo Māori in written, and oral contexts.

There is a growing body of written material available for Māori readers, such as [He Kōrero Tātai series](#), and materials available in the programme to translate 100 English language books into Māori, [Kotahi Rau Pukapuka](#).

A kaupapa Māori focus on literacy means that kaiako acknowledge and understand that ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ happen in both contemporary and traditional forms. For example, being literate and able to read signs within the taiao | environment, such as the stars and moon, can be a strength for ākonga. Furthermore, understanding symbols and the designs of carved figures and kōwhaiwhai patterns, and oratory skills displayed in the whaikōrero contexts on marae shows the depth and breadth of literacy from a Māori perspective.

Research by Professor Russell Bishop and Professor Mere Berryman in *Te Kotahitanga* (2007) “suggests that improvements in Māori students’ achievement can result from changing the interactions and relationships within classrooms”. Russell also states “there’s minimal large-scale research to show grouping practices within Māori medium settings”, however, findings by Bishop and colleagues (2001) show there are instructional teaching and grouping practices that are culturally legitimate to te ao Māori.

These practices may be evident in intentional teaching strategies such as tuakana-teina and ako, and implemented in both Māori medium and English medium settings.

“...improvements in Māori students’ achievement can result from changing the interactions and relationships within classrooms”.

Professor Russell Bishop
and Professor Mere Berryman
in *Te Kotahitanga* (2007)

What does it mean to destream literacy?

Destreaming literacy means lifting achievement by using flexible groupings to teach reading and writing, and offering high level learning opportunities to all ākonga. Mixed and flexible forms of ability grouping result in much greater academic progress for ākonga (Rubie-Davies, 2015).

Destreaming literacy involves providing equitable opportunities to learn by:

- + teaching literacy skills in flexible groups
- + offering all ākonga high level learning opportunities that empower them to be successful
- + offering all ākonga stimulating activities to support motivation, achievement, and progress.

Instead of teaching literacy using traditional ability grouping, high expectation kaiako use flexible forms of grouping to tailor learning to the needs of ākonga.

Grouping is not fixed and regularly changes to suit the needs of ākonga.

Kaiako who are taking action to destream literacy may group ākonga in a variety of ways, including:

- + social grouping
- + mixed ability grouping
- + pairing ākonga with someone who is not at the same achievement level
- + whole class activities.

Kaiako continue to identify ākonga who need support with particular skills (such as decoding particular phoneme-grapheme correspondences or consonant blends) and will include them in groups for targeted teaching. Flexible grouping allows for levelled activities within groups. Day-to-day observations and conversations with ākonga inform the decisions kaiako make about flexible reading groups.

“

When ākonga are given more advanced opportunities to learn, they can make more progress than might previously have been thought possible”.

Christine Rubie-Davies



SOURCE AND FURTHER READING:

[Raising the bar with flexible grouping, Christine Rubie-Davies | The New Zealand Curriculum Online](#)

Partnership with whānau and carers



In Aotearoa New Zealand, whānau and carers are partners in literacy learning.

Confidently collaborating with whānau and carers, and communicating the thinking behind your school's approach to literacy learning (and grouping practices) helps whānau to effectively support their child's learning.



SOURCE AND FURTHER READING:
[Partnering with parents, whānau, and communities | Inclusive Education](#)

Some of the key factors for effectively partnering with whānau and carers for literacy learning are explored below.



Partnership

Learning partnerships strengthen whānau involvement in their child's education and have positive impacts on outcomes for ākonga. Whānau appreciate hearing that their contributions are valued.



Leadership

Partnership works well when school leaders have a vision and commitment to work in partnership with all whānau. Create communication channels and ways to engage that are responsive to your school community.



Relationships

Mutual trust and respect are critical to relationships in which staff and whānau and carers share responsibility for children's learning and wellbeing.



Communication

Timely, useful, and easily understood communication with whānau and carers provides opportunities to exchange information. Consider hosting literacy learning events to discuss the purpose of home reading and consider modelling reading with tamariki in a patient and positive way. Offer whānau and carers the opportunity to ask questions.

What's involved? Making the shift in thinking



Doing the groundwork:

- + **Develop and share the vision for change:**
Ensure that all staff involved understand the 'what,' 'how' and importantly the 'why' of implementing flexible and mixed ability grouping in literacy learning.
- + **Understand your current situation:**
What is your current approach to grouping for literacy learning?
- + **Share a sense of urgency:**
Communicate the harm caused by streaming and fixed grouping, and the thinking and research behind the shift to flexible grouping. You may wish to explore our useful links page.
- + **Prioritise buy-in throughout the change process:**
Ongoing discussion with everyone (ākonga, kaiako, whānau and community) builds ownership and will reduce friction as you implement flexible grouping – setting a solid foundation for sustaining change.
- + **Be flexible, and know your plan will (and should) change:**
Rigidly following a pre-determined plan is an inefficient use of time and impairs leadership. Foster an atmosphere of inquiry and take your lead from the needs of ākonga as you decide on flexible grouping options.
- + **Prototype, and allow space for failures:**
Experimentation allows for validation and improvement of new approaches, and builds a culture of innovation and ownership.
- + **Maintain an active model:**
Consciously apply a model of continuous improvement and inquiry that will keep people invested in flexible grouping, discourage complacency and allow for sustained change.
- + **Measure the change:**
Use data and evidence to monitor change outcomes such as phonics screening tools, PATs, e-asTTle, and student voice and engagement surveys. When data is positive it will increase buy-in and build momentum and when negative it will allow for understanding and improvement.
- + **Celebrate the change!**



SOURCE AND FURTHER READING:

[Leading sustainable change | Grow Waitaha](#)

Where do I start?



Where do I start?



- + Explore this guide, reflect and discuss what ending streaming and implementing flexible grouping will look like for your ākonga, your classroom, and your kura.
- + Reflect on the flexible grouping strategies you might like to try with ākonga.
- + Select reading materials that are interesting, engaging, and appropriately challenging. Ensure the texts offer multiple teaching points to address the needs of ākonga in the group.

How will I know what my ākonga need to learn?



- + Gather data on previous assessments.
- + Observe and monitor the needs of ākonga.
- + Use rubrics and learning outcomes with ākonga to make learning explicit and visible.

How will I know when they have learned something?



- + Use a range of methods for understanding ākonga progress e.g., formative assessments, self and peer reflections, rubrics, observations and monitoring, professional judgments, discussions, and the quality of completed activities.

Where do I start?

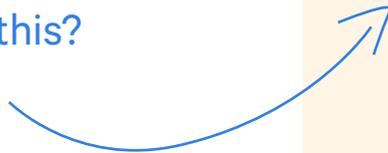


How will I help them learn?



- + Partner with ākonga to set goals and reflect on them to support learning.
- + Provide examples of 'good' quality work to communicate clear expectations to ākonga.
- + Make the learning visible; ākonga need to understand what they are learning, where they are at, and what their next steps are.
- + Provide a range of tasks with different difficulty levels for ākonga to choose from.

How long will it take to get my head around this?



- + Allow time to explore the flexible grouping strategies in this resource.
- + As a team, decide which tools and systems are going to work for you and allocate 6 months to build your confidence.
- + Review in 6 months.
- + Build a community of practice and coordinate professional learning conversations based on the needs of your kura.

How to select mixed ability and flexible groupings

Using flexible and mixed ability grouping is a visible indication that a kaiako has high expectations for the literacy learning of all ākonga.

Flexible groupings change regularly, giving ākonga opportunities to learn different things from different people.

Mixed ability grouping means that ākonga are grouped for non academic reasons.

Structured literacy programmes do not rely on ability groups – ākonga need to move around flexibly according to their needs.

Flexible grouping is an effective practice for enhancing the knowledge and skills of ākonga without the negative social consequences associated with more permanent reading groups (Flood, Lapp, Flood, & Nagel, 1992).

Ways to select mixed ability groups:

- + ice block sticks
- + jigsaw pieces
- + ākonga choice
- + random numbers
- + Class Dojo random grouping
- + using a variety of classroom equipment e.g, UniLink linking cubes (you might suggest to ākonga to group with 3 others to make a pattern such as blue, pink, white, orange)
- + whole class teaching then splinter grouping (you might teach a new concept to a large group, once ākonga grasp the concept, they splinter off to complete tasks collaboratively and then independently).

Strategies for flexible grouping practices: junior school

Bookmarks and sets of five

Select a bookmark to go with each child and the book they take home. These bookmarks help whānau understand what support they can provide when their child brings books home to read.

Consider putting reading books from across levels out in sets of five, and allowing ākonga to choose which one to read.

- + Ākonga select the book they want to read.
- + Kaiako calls the group by their book selection.
- + Kaiako reads the book to the tamariki first.
- + Kaiako then focuses on different skills for those within the group – all ākonga are listening and absorbing. For example, kaiako could use the Phonics Plus sound cards which include activities from across levels for one sound/letter.
- + Kaiako selects a bookmark that goes with each book.



[DOWNLOAD BOOKMARKS →](#)

Theme boxes

- + Consider creating theme boxes such as 'outer space' with lots of books about planets, Matariki, space travel, the moon and the stars. Some books are easier to read than others to cater for a range of different reading levels.
- + Allow ākonga to choose what they want to read.
- + Kaiako selects a bookmark that goes with each book.



Strategies for flexible grouping practices: middle and senior school



Chapter Chat for years 3-8

Chapter Chat is a reading initiative that includes teaching resources for children's chapter books and a variety of activities that give ākongā agency over how they share their understanding of the book.

Chapter Chat is a great whole class reading programme. Each week a new set of activities become available. Many schools across New Zealand read the same book and the same chapters simultaneously, and every Friday there is a conversation on X (Twitter) where ākongā across the motu discuss and share the literature they are reading.

There is a new chapter book each term for year 3-8 and you can join the Chapter Chat Facebook group or view the site here: chapterchatnz.com

Weekly Chapter Chat tasks (from the Facebook group) provide 'must do' and 'can do' activities to give ākongā agency and allow for differentiation.

All ākongā are able to prepare their answers to the X chat questions in advance. A suggested approach is to give each ākongā one question to answer. It's important to give ākongā the opportunity to read and comment on other responses from across the country.

Making Reading Social

CHAPTERCHATNZ.COM



#NZreadaloud: focussing on NZ authors

#NZreadaloud is a connected literacy initiative that began in 2015.

The aim of this programme is simple – one book to connect ākonga across Aotearoa. The focus is on stories set in New Zealand and written by New Zealand authors. #NZreadaloud is an interactive and integrated approach to literacy in your classroom that welcomes kaiako and ākonga from year 3 through to year 10.

#NZreadaloud is:

- + held in terms 1–3
- + offers opportunities to connect with other classes across the motu
- + includes flexible tasks
- + offers regular X chats, and Blogger, Flipgrid and Zoom events
- + often includes opportunities to meet the author.



Literacy circles



Consider setting up in-class book clubs or literacy circles that allow ākongā to choose a novel for a novel study.

Begin with a 'book sale' that gives a quick overview of the books available for selection.

- + Ākongā rank the books in order of their preference.
- + Small groups of ākongā come together to choose a book.
- + Kaiako and ākongā discuss various roles within the group and model tasks.
- + Ākongā work independently, rotating roles and conducting weekly ākongā-led meetings.
- + Ākongā decide how much of the book to read before the weekly meetings and all members agree not to read past this point.
- + Individuals complete tasks in between meetings.
- + Kaiako sets up a weekly timetable of scheduled novel meetings and attends meetings to observe participation, quality of work, and understanding of the book.
- + Kaiako creates literature circle management sheets for each group to monitor their roles and peer assess.



WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

[Literature Circle Role Cards: Literacy Solutions](#)

[iPad Literature Circles](#)

[Literature Circle Role Sheet](#)

Examples of literature circle roles:

- + **Discussion director:** develops a list of questions for group conversations.
- + **Literary luminary:** locates sections of the text the group would like to hear read aloud.
- + **Illustrator:** draws a picture or creates an image related to the reading.
- + **Connector:** finds connections or links between the book and something outside the text.
- + **Summariser:** prepares a brief summary of the day's reading.
- + **Vocabulary enricher:** locates important or unusual words that appear in the text.
- + **Travel tracer:** tracks the action that takes place in a story and records it as a diagram or map.
- + **Investigator:** finds out background information about the book.

Useful ways to evaluate flexible groupings

Evaluating flexible groupings throughout the teaching and learning sequences is a useful approach.

The aim is for you and each ākonga to understand where they are at and what their next steps are. Evaluate flexible groupings through:

- + kōrero, talanoa and discussions with ākonga
- + ākonga reflections, feedback and self-review
- + peer evaluations
- + observations
- + formative assessments
- + assessment data



Hei whakakapi | Final thoughts



This guide is not a “to-do” list, but we hope our suggestions might inspire you to try something different.



Space for your reflection

- + One thing I can do today to get started in my setting is...
- + What’s working well and what do we need to change? How do we know?
- + What actions do we need to take?
- + How will this guide support change in our kura?
- + What could we explore further?

“

Te tokotoko o Raki e tū ake
rā, ka puta ki te whai ao, ki
te ao mārama! Haumi ē, hui
ē, taiki ē!”

Useful links and further reading



[Kōkirihiā - the plan for removing streaming from our schools | Tokona te Raki](#) →

[He Awa Ara Rau | Tokona te Raki](#) →

[Streaming shame | E-Tangata](#) →

[De-streaming: a community response](#) (PDF 71KB) →

[Streaming in schools decides futures at age five | University of Auckland](#) →

[Bringing destreaming to life in a primary school maths class | Grow Waitaha](#) →

[Raising the bar with flexible grouping / NZC Online blog / Curriculum resources / Kia ora](#) →

www.facebook.com/ChapterChatNZ →

[Leading sustainable change | Grow Waitaha](#) (PDF 6.64MB) →

[Adaptive Governance | Grow Waitaha](#) (PDF 1.16MB) →

[Destreaming Literacy Bookmarks](#) (PDF 129KB) →

Whakapā mai | Get in touch

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