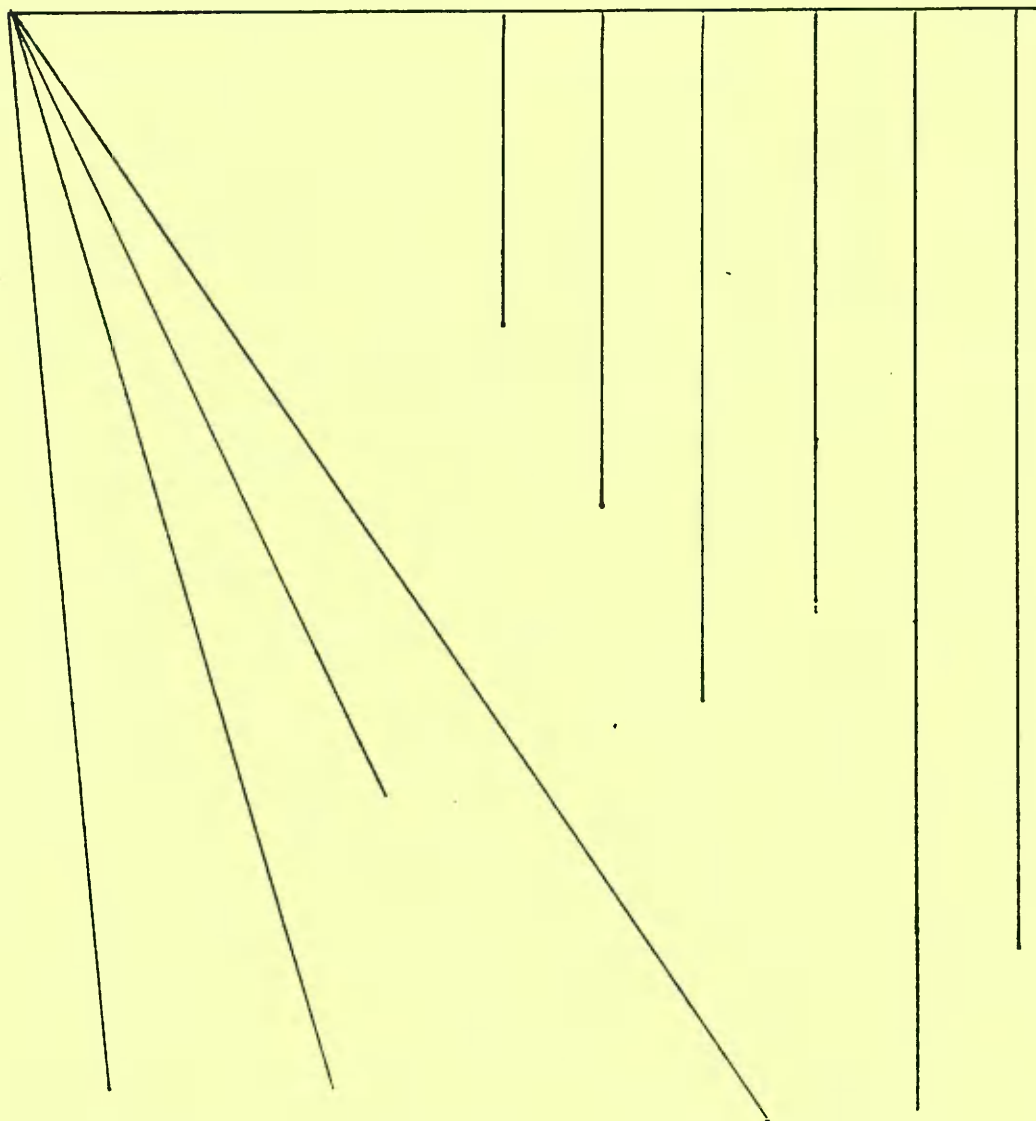


# COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSALS

OF THE 1986 CURRICULUM REVIEW



ISSUES IN EDUCATION - number 10

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from AUCKLAND COMMITTEE ON RACISM & DISCRIMINATION  
response to the 1986 Draft Report of the Curriculum Review  
Committee.



## INTRODUCTION

While we strongly support the majority of the recommendations, we are sceptical about the ability of the department and the schools to change in the ways envisaged. Our scepticism arises from a fuller study of the history of education in this country than the committee appears to have undertaken. (See Paper 9 for background to ACCRD's comments).

Such history as is presented, e.g. p 10-11, has been sanitised. There are minimal references to the unpleasant aspects of certain acts of parliament such as the requirement of the 1867 Native Schools Act that Maori communities had to provide land, assist with the building of the school and contribute to teachers' salaries. But there is no mention of the clearly-stated assimilationist goals that those same acts were intended to achieve. Nor is there any recognition of the ways in which the dominant, Pakeha, group has appropriated aspects of Maori culture for inclusion within the colonial education system. Finally, there seems to have been no attempt to understand how willingly the majority of educators participated in the attempted deculturation of the Maori people. Whatever the reasons for their willingness, and many were highly ethnocentric, they have left a legacy of effects, reported motivations and practices that need to be acknowledged and exorcised rather than glossed over.

Because the committee did not address the history of New Zealand education adequately, it cannot be specific about the changes that must occur, and it is forced to present the outcomes of past policies/practices as if they were natural. For example: "There is little doubt that English will remain the major language of New Zealand..." (p53). A direct consequence of this is that the Maori people appear as those who have "lost" their language etc. rather than as a people who have struggled to preserve their mana and resources against the assaults of the Pakeha. The a-historical perspective is more comfortable for Pakeha because it allows us to retain a belief in our good intentions towards Maori people. The truth is that we sought to dispossess them and destroy their culture. It appears, from some of the cited submission excerpts, that some of us Pakeha are still trying to legitimate our presence here by those same means. In pursuit of those colonial goals we settlers used many processes, even within the education system. The definition of content, the means of assessment, the training of teachers - each has had negative effects on Maori people. So, as we seek to put in place a major re-orientation, it is necessary to inspect the components and to be far more specific about what must happen: in particular, how and by whom the changes will be monitored. Otherwise this review will become yet another well-intentioned plan for educational reform that gathers dust.

## EVALUATING THE PROPOSALS

In evaluating the proposals we have looked for three things:

- \* what is to be different?
- \* how will it be done?
- \* who will monitor the change?

We are very concerned that the Review Committee should go on to be quite specific in identifying the responsibility for particular changes, to reduce the risk of proposals being pigeon-holed indefinitely.



## Proposals arising from the History

There are some 24 proposals, spread over most sections, that appear to represent responses to history: either its effects in the present, or a commitment to redirect our education. We will tackle these under five headings in this paper.

### 1. Statements of Principle

Three proposals in the Curriculum section (30, 31, 40) seem to enunciate principles upon which our education system should be based: recognition of the Maori as tangata whenua o Aotearoa; commitment of the schools to provide the fullest possible support for Maori language and culture; and, weaker than the others, a commitment to the balanced presentation of our history and the Treaty of Waitangi.

First, we do not accept that the notion of 'balance' is appropriate in the final statement - there are not two sides to our history. There are points of complexity and unresolved issues which should be recognised, as must the tangled web of human motives and actions. If children are to learn about justice and equality (p53) it is important that they recognise the ways in which, historically, we have failed to live those values.

It is neither desirable nor necessary to separate Te Tiriti o Waitangi from the recognition of Maori as tangata whenua. The Treaty arose from that recognition and reaffirms it. It is the document on which the would-be partnership of Pakeha and Maori in this land must stand. It defines the priorities for our institutions.

If these statements are strengthened as we suggest we would support them most strongly, but they should be top of the list of such principles, not buried in the body of the text.

### 2. Racism

There are only three proposals: Teacher Training (4f and 15) and Recruitment and Selection of Teachers (6) that address the issue of racism. This is a matter of grave concern as any effective change in education requires the dismantling of the present racist system and our resocialising to live and work, as Pakeha, in an anti-racist way. Racism is not prejudice, and the committee appears to understand that when it talks of individuals being "trained to recognise the effects of racism and take active steps to eliminate it from schools" (Teacher Training, 15). In contrast, the committee does not appear to understand the way in which racist outcomes are carried by procedures/practices that are legitimate within the dominant culture, so that eliminating racism is not just a matter of training.

Our comments here begin with training, then describe some important anti-racism priorities that should be introduced and lastly talk about the need for anti-racism work to precede bicultural initiatives.

Members of our group are among the most experienced anti-racism course facilitators in this country. We know from bitter experience that it is difficult to do effective work, even with those who believe they wish to participate. This means that all such education, whether for trainee teachers or for current education staff, must have real-life consequences. The Auckland College of Education (Primary) recently introduced 100 hours of "Multicultural Education". Of that time, 3.5 hours only were for anti-racism training, a minute proportion of the students' college time, and a clear message about



its relative importance - it was sandwiched in among other course work with no interconnection or suggestion that it might be basic to understanding other experiences. Furthermore, the students had no choice as the course had not been part of the college programme when they were accepted, and the staff had not provided an adequate rationale for their (the students) participation. It is clear to us that any racism education must be given sufficient time, and must be sustained and integrated into the course structure (one-off sessions are of very limited value), must have adequate resources to provide student support, and there must be a way of relating assessment of the participants' response to off-course behaviour.

There are a number of groups with experience in running courses who would be willing to assist the department or teachers colleges to develop this part of their programme. The cutting edge of this work would be the new procedures, and there would need to be a substantial staff adequately trained to run programmes, help schools, colleges and offices to organise this aspect of education, especially for Pakeha students, and to assist with ongoing reorganisation.

Dealing with racism involves identifying the ways Pakeha assumptions about values, lifestyle and economic self-interest are being laid on other peoples, and the ways we have been socialised to live with the results of such oppression, and then, as a group, acting on that new understanding.

The following three examples point to needed changes and exemplify the operation of racism.

Qualifications, the identification of achievement or merit, is important in the organisation of education. Schools and other training organisations are important consumers of qualified people, and they are the primary source of recognised qualifications. Western cultures emphasise the importance of the written word, a preference which we have built into schooling in this country. It has also been the basis of 'qualification'. Normal departmental procedures know how to handle certificates, degrees and diplomas. The equivalences are known, or can be determined. There is more difficulty in defining relevant experience, but that is typically equated with time on the job. The racism lies in the failure to give equal weight to merit as defined by community or whanau, as, for example, with competence in Maori or other Pacific languages. The committee makes one proposal about qualifications (Recruitment and Selection, 6) but we would like to see a stronger statement that recognises the wider issue of "Who defines merit?"

One symptom of a racist institution is the inequitable distribution of resources. Within education, the failure to ensure adequate funding for Kohanga Reo and the now-essential bilingual schools, staff and teaching resources, is a current example. There are indications that key staff within the department are reluctant to be seen to favour Maori people. They talk of seeing all points of view and not being hasty, but the bottom line is insufficient resources for Te Kohanga Reo. The demarcation dispute between Social Welfare and Education told us much about bureaucratic definitions of child-care and pre-school education but did not free up the needed funds. Current usage still identifies Maori people as a "minority" rather than as tangata whenua. This re-labelling is a total denial of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and calls into play ideas of benevolence by the dominant and reasonableness for the oppressed. Minorities are seen as being allowed limited identity and may be given limited assistance to meet their goals. That kind of support may be appropriate for minorities within the Tau Iwi, the Scots, Dutch, Samoan, Chinese etc. but not for the people who were guaranteed te tino rangatiratanga over all their taonga which, the Waitangi Tribunal has ruled, includes te reo Maori. But the tag 'minority' allows decision-makers to



balance off support for Kohanga Reo against computers for schools, health education, teacher re-training, or whatever, and claim they are doing enough when they are self-limited by their procedural assumptions.

The committee has affirmed the Maori people as tangata whenua, the next, necessary step is to require the Education Department to ensure that sufficient resources are available to the Kohanga Reo/bilingual schools programme. Clearly funds will be needed from other sources, but the undertaking has to be to find what is needed. This is part of the Pakeha commitment under Te Tiriti, and some reparation for the vicious, sustained attacks we have launched on the Maori language, with the aid of funds which ultimately originate in the wealth of the land, Aotearoa.

A further example of the way in which a 'standard practice' produces a racist outcome is provided by a recently created working party. Despite the Review Committee's belief that curriculum planning ought not be a piecemeal process a committee was established in September 1986 to plan a new 6th and 7th form English curriculum. "Everyone knows" that the way to set up such committees is to approach 'interested parties' or 'expert groups' and ask them to nominate appropriate people. This is exactly what is suggested for the Proposed Secondary Board of Studies (Learning and Achieving, p 103-5). The only problem is that this procedure typically produces a committee on which Maori people are either not represented or have only a single participant. In the latter case they can speak, may even be "heard", but are subject to the Pakeha veto. (We understand that it took a special effort to create the Curriculum Review Committee and it is probably the most representative working group on education ever.) With respect to the English Curriculum group the department made it clear that it hoped for a widely representative and balanced committee. The result of the nominations was roughly equal numbers of men and women but only one Maori person, who was overseas at the time and likely to miss the first meetings. There was also a Samoan among those with observer status. It was a predictable outcome: that procedure has done the same thing repeatedly in the past. If the department wants a different outcome, it clearly needs a different procedure.

We encourage the committee to support the development of a new process. One which we have heard about suggests that there should be a committee of committees which oversees the creation of all departmental committees, working parties and planning groups. This standing committee on committees should have equal representation of tangata whenua and tau iwi (all who are not Maori), the membership selected in the ways that seem best to each group. When a new body is to be set up, the appropriate bodies are approached and asked to nominate several names: the standing committee then selects a balanced group from those so nominated.

New processes are necessary to prevent the old practices from continuing to determine the outcomes. Unless racism training occurs in institutions around the points where such structural changes are taking place, it is of limited effect.

Finally, we believe that racism awareness is necessary for bicultural initiatives to be effective. Learning Maori, language or culture, is not a valid alternative to anti-racism work with its emphasis on creating new procedures and structures. In our experience it is the racism education which prepares for these bicultural changes by providing both the reason for the change and the motivation for Pakeha to work for, support and accept change.



### 3. Bicultural Initiatives

These are proposed in Curriculum (32, 33, 34) and Teacher Training (4b,c,d,e, 13, 16-18) and this appears to be where the committee has focussed its response to the racist education system. The logic appears impeccable: Maori language and culture have been excluded in the past and we should now rectify that. The missing element is that those who promoted that exclusion/limited inclusion, the Pakeha, are still in the decision making positions. The experience of many Maori teachers is that trying to teach taha Maori under these conditions is both personally destructive and distorts the Maoritanga being taught.

It needs to be remembered that it is only the monocultural Pakeha who need this resocialising. It is our cultural horizons that need to be broadened. And it is certainly accepted that until more Pakeha are bicultural there will be only limited support for some changes that are needed but, as we argued in the Racism section, implementing bicultural courses, processes and programmes requires anti-racist people and structures. To rely heavily on bicultural initiatives is to make considerable demands on limited Maori resources, and it is for Maori people to determine whether they wish to make that commitment or would choose other priorities.

Who are the bicultural initiatives for? To clarify our comment above that they are primarily beneficial to Pakeha, consider one example: the way we currently define subject areas. These are typically treated as if they had a universal significance, but they arise within the Western intellectual tradition, and often arose by happenstance. This is the way in which our ancestors chose to divide up the world of knowledge. In the sciences we have included much that other cultures have seen as religious or mystical - and our physicists are now creating some headaches as they appear to be moving out of science and back into those spheres. It is not a question of whose categorisation is correct, but of recognising that we have confused our (culturally determined) categories with reality. So we need to learn to see some things in at least one other way as a first step to an appropriate cultural humility. We argue strongly elsewhere that teachers should know where the concepts which they are teaching come from, and an essential part of that is knowledge of the cultural system within which they arose.

As Pakeha who are seeking to become bicultural we support the increased availability of Maori language and culture. We have been clear that participation in such programmes must be linked with anti-racism education. We also wish to say as strongly as possible that we do not believe that it is appropriate to nurture the monocultural Pakeha at Maori expense. Maori language has been pushed out of our schools and subjected to sustained assault by our English speaking world. Its position is perilously close to language death and it must not be pushed to extinction by heavy, ill-timed demands on the relatively few native speakers, to serve Pakeha needs.

In talking of resources, we identify a tremendous array of resources needed for the Maori language to survive: people for speaking, writing, planning and teaching; space and time to create teaching units; money for buildings, books, video and audio tapes and so forth. Apart from Te Kohanga Reo and the needs which it creates in later schooling, we probably need to support Maori language institutes akin to those existing in France, Germany or Wales. Maori people should determine the priorities for the use of the resources, but the resources need to be generous. With those reservations we support the committee's proposals.



#### 4. Support for Maori Students and Teachers

This may not be how the committee envisaged the proposals included as Curriculum (35,36) Teacher Training (4a), of Recruitment and Selection (2, 4,5). We believe that, as presently stated, these measures lean heavily towards the bicultural initiatives rather than the currently needed support for Maori. The committee should be much clearer that it sees a need to provide Maori people with the resources to define and achieve the continued life of their language and people. At certain points that may well require their participation in selection processes, such as in selecting committees as described in section 2 above. Where they are asked to participate, the Treaty of Waitangi and their standing as tangata whenua demands that they have an authoritative part in the proceedings. It is no longer appropriate for Maori people to be 'advisors' - who can be ignored or over-ruled.

To achieve the goals of improving performance of Maori students, it will be necessary to make multiple changes. There is strong Maori support for proposals like Curriculum 35, and we tautoko it. But if that occurs in schools built on a philosophy that is anti-Maori, as many currently are, or within constraints created by foreign priorities about the use of time, educational practice or the definition of qualifications, then we believe that it will have a limited and disappointing effect. There must be mechanisms by which the nature of our schools can be changed to make them more fitting places for these gifts offered from the Maori people.

#### 5. Organisation and Practice

This is a selection of organisational changes: Curriculum, 37-39, Management, 1 (where appropriate), Teacher Training, 14, Recruitment and Selection, 7, and Resources, 6. In expressing limited support for these proposals we want to reiterate our concern that Maori people not be used to decorate processes that remain resolutely Pakeha. As a partial protection against such exploitation there should be some responsible group/individual/body to whom Maori people can communicate their experiences and who will act as their advocate in negotiating more appropriate involvement. Unless there is such an authoritative body, we will continue to have individual Maori people and small groups expressing their anger, frustration and disappointment while the intransigent institutions plead ignorance of their offence.

For similar reasons we would prefer the committee to say who is to be responsible for introducing these changes. Most clearly require a period of negotiation to identify the kind of machinery that is suited to the goals and the way in which the interests of the various parties can be adequately represented.