

OBSTACLES TO MAORI EDUCATION

Unuhia te rito o te harakeke, kei hea te komako ?

E ui mai koe; "He aha te mea pai ?"

Ka ki atu au; "He tangata, he tangata, he tangata."

I am to speak of the obstacles to Maori educational achievement and I will argue that we - the Pakeha teachers, administrators, politicians and population constitute the primary obstacle. We participate in an education system that was shaped by political priorities and beliefs of White supremacy. As products of that system we are unable to respond appropriately to Maori initiatives because we are largely unaware of the extent to which we have been shaped by that past.

Before European settlement Maori society had procedures for providing formal training in essential skills and it is clear that they had theories of how learning occurred. When the new skills of reading, writing and numbering arrived Maori people became enthusiastic learners and teachers. William Williams reports:

"One young man began to ask the use of letters. They were written down for him, and in half an hour he knew them all and was teaching those about him." (Barrington & Beaglehole p 20)

This was no isolated event as schools were erected in districts that had little or no missionary contact. The method, as summarised by Barrington & Beaglehole, was discussion and study group; peer teaching at its most effective. In this educational Mana Maori Motuhake the emphasis was on the skills and, as with agriculture, their adaptation to Maori practice and priorities rather than a simple-minded absorption of the European wrappings in which they were presented. By 1840, on best estimates the majority of the Maori population were literate to the extent that they could at least read and write a little in their own language. The volumes of correspondence received by missionaries, governors and others testifies to considerable literacy in many Maori.

Prior to this, in missionary societies, the Colonial Office and the New

Zealand Company it had been decided that the future for the Maori was to be "civilised". That process was not to be a two-way one, Maori was to learn from Pakeha. The latter did not need to know the Maori language or culture; it was for the Maori to learn English. This resolve may well have been strengthened by the threat the settlers saw in an increasingly literate Maori population. The first step was 1847 Education Ordinance which provided support for mission schools on the condition that:

"In every school to be established or supported by public funds under the provision of this Ordinance, religious education, industrial training, and instruction in the English language shall form a necessary part of the system to be pursued therein." (Section 3)

(Biggs, p74)

Teaching English as a foreign language did not provide an English speaking Maori population quickly enough. Here is Henry Taylor, Auckland Inspector of Native Schools in a report to parliament, 1862:

"The Native language itself is also another obstacle in the way of civilisation, so long as it exists there is a barrier to the free and unrestrained intercourse which ought to exist between the two races, it shuts out the less civilised portion of the population from the benefits which intercourse with the more enlightened would offer.

It is not surprising that, given such reports and encouragement the General Assembly decided that English was to be the medium of instruction for Maori students. The Native Education Act 1867 also required that the syllabus should be: "...the ordinary subjects of primary English education..." There is no record of consultation with Maori people over this step but the parliamentary debate showed that the step was not based on educational principles. Mr J.C. Richmond moving the second reading said:

"...for a people in the position of the Maori race it was a first condition of their progress to put them in the way of learning the language of the inhabitants and government of the Colony."

An ex-inspector of Native Schools, H. Carleton said:

"...things had now come to that pass that it was necessary either to

exterminate the Natives or to civilize them. Honorable members were now no doubt well up in the financial question, and all would, he was sure, agree that another serious war would not only cripple the Colony but would actually break its back. The idea of exterminating the Natives could not for a moment be dreamed of in that House, and there was, therefore, no alternative but to vote for the measure before the House...

"They could never civilise them through the medium of a language that was imperfect as a medium of thought. If they attempted it, failure was inevitable; and civilization could only be eventually carried out by means of a perfect language." (NZ Parliamentary Debates, 1867, 862-3)

Maori response was mixed. Many in Taranaki, King Country and Urewera saw the imperialism and rejected it. In other areas the response was shaped by the realisation that Pakeha were not sharing power and that English might be the only way to participate in this new world being imposed on them.

From this arose petitions for schools and teaching in English.

Training for those who taught in these schools was inadequate or non-existent for many years. Staff were not required to know Maori and were enjoined to use what they knew only with new entrants. In his annual report of 1888, J.H. Pope, Inspector of Native Schools restated the purpose of the schools and provided his alibi for their lack of success:

"The work of teaching the Maoris to speak, write, and understand English is in importance second only to that of making them acquainted with European customs and ways of thinking, and so fitting them for becoming orderly and law-abiding citizens."

"The task is one of extreme difficulty for many reasons; the Maori language is so fundamentally different from English that, to say nothing of hereditary aptitudes, the Maori, from the time that he begins to speak and think has his vocal organs and thinking faculties moulded in such a way that he could hardly be rendered more unfitted for speaking English and using it as an instrument of thought if his vernacular had been specially devised for that very purpose..."

(AJHR, 1888, E-2, p.9)

From about 1909 the majority of Maori pupils were attending Board schools and it is clear that this was one reason why teachers were encouraged to:

"...to take every care to impress upon the children the necessity of practising outside the school the lessons they learn within it."

(W.W. Bird, Inspector of Native Schools, annual report, AJHR, 1906, E-2, p11)

And it is not long before the total war on Maori language is declared in and by the schools. This was modified in the 1930s by including elements of Maori history, arts, music, and games in the curriculum of several subjects for both Maori and Pakeha pupils; facilitated by bulletins from the department and training college courses but these changes left Maori pupils as unacknowledged minorities in most schools. Though the overt anti-Maori sentiment of early years was gone it was replaced by the belief that we were one people and that distinctions were destructive. One important example comes from the Currie Commission Report (1962) p408. To examine the performance of Maori pupils in School Certificate the commission had to look at results for candidates it could locate, the requisite data was not being recorded by the department at that time. That exam, as you will all know, continues to be the single most effective impediment to Maori achievement. The department annually releases figures demonstrating that the exam is destructive; how long would it be before the department, the School Certificate Board and the profession took drastic action if it was our children who were being failed at the 75% rate that the Maori candidates suffer. The exam is the clearest single statement of educational intent in this country, it is an examination that has its roots in the old matriculation and is hedged round with notions of "standards" and "goals" that make some sort of sense in our individualised instruction system. If Maori students are penalised it must be because they are deficient, the schools they attend aren't good enough or they need particular remedial work. The exam is not changed because, despite the recent expose of the scaling system, there is not a strong commitment to educational justice for Maori pupils. There has been no sustained search for more appropriate procedures or processes. And that is because of the attitudes that have been engendered by the historical

processes I have outlined. In the remaining time I am going to touch on key attitudes by quoting teachers. An equivalent set of statements could be obtained from any other Pakeha group and together they indicate why Maori children are so much at risk in our schools.

We are one people. This lie figures very strongly in the opinions of those who oppose recognition of Maori initiatives.

"I think its bad, this use of Pakeha and Maori. I suppose I do tend towards the fact that we are all New Zealanders, and yet part of New Zealand culture is to have the best from Maori culture.... Anything else leads to separatism and exclusiveness and dislike...."

"As for influencing the curriculum, we have to realise, first and foremost that we are all New Zealanders."

"I feel it is more important that everyone (gets) their fair share of whatever we are trying to put across, so that we can become a race of people, not a race of Maori, New Zealand Pakeha, or Polynesians from Tonga etc."

Maori pupils have deficiencies which account for their failure to learn and avoid confronting the failure of the schools.

"...because the Maori is not a self-motivated person academically, he doesn't perform as well as the average Pakeha at whichever level he is.."

"They're lacking books in the home. They're lacking people to read to them in the way the average Pakeha might."

"The average Maori family is on a lower socioeconomic level. They haven't got so much. They don't know how to use it when they get it. I don't think there's any doubt at all that the average Maori family spends a lot more on beer, cigarettes and the TAB."

To acknowledge Maori identity is to give favours and create unwarranted privilege.

"I don't think you have to bend over backwards to .. take into account their (Maori) culture, as long as you take it slow enough."

"Well half of me says yes, we've got to try and get Maoris in a higher socio-economic group... and part of me says... well, we're sometimes

bending over backwards. They get more scholarships percentage-wise than the Pakeha."

And behind it all is the belief that assimilation is the answer.

"..although it is going to be painful, the only solution is complete integration... they are going to be completely Westernised through economic factors."

"I don't think I would do it (teach Maori language and greetings) for the purpose of making everybody happy. I mean they're in the English system and they're here to learn English, and why beat around the bush and make everyone happy?"

"But look, we live in a European society and the Maoris have lived in it for over 140 years... Right from the start they should have been allowed to keep their own culture... but I can't see Maoritanga being of any value to Maoris in New Zealand.... They've accepted the European way of life up till now and as far as I'm concerned they're New Zealanders same as we are..."

What I have shown in this brief presentation is the ways in which schools were coopted for the white supremacist goals of "civilising" the Maori. I have sought to show how we, the inheritors of that system, have internalised many of the attitudes, goals and myths upon which it was founded. Until we face that history and its consequences in our education system, in ourselves and in our colleagues we will continue to put obstacles in the way of Maori education.

Barrington, J.M. & T.H. Beaglehole, Maori Schools in a Changing Society. N.Z.C.E.R., Wellington, 1974.

Biggs, B.G. "The Maori Language Past and Present", in Schwimmer E. (Ed) The Maori People in the Nineteen-Sixties. Blackwood & Janet Paul, Auckland, 1968.