

THE POLICIES OF DECEPTION- avoiding accountability to the Maori people

BY KEITH THORSEN



Keith Thorsen is on leave from his position of PPTA field officer. He is freelance writing and is the co-editor of this edition of the Journal.

*"The central issue is the powerlessness of the Maori people within the education system."
Ranginui Walker.*

*"The education system works to keep the Maori people in an inferior position. It starts on the day the Maori child enters a new entrance class at primary school. From that moment the Maori child is viewed, tested, and taught from a Pakeha perspective. When the child doesn't fit that perspective s/he is seen as a problem."
Rawinia Penfold*

We have officially moved from an education policy of assimilation through the integration policies espoused in the Hunn Report to a position of putting a positive value on cultural diversity.

Yet there are persistent Maori voices telling us nothing has changed. They are saying we have been practising policies of deception that disguise the underlying reality of Pakeha domination and allow it to continue. They are, in my opinion, correct.

The power imbalance is generally in society. The connection between society and schooling needs analysis but there is insufficient space here.⁽²⁾ This article concentrates on how the power imbalance is evidenced in the secondary education system and discusses changes to that system.

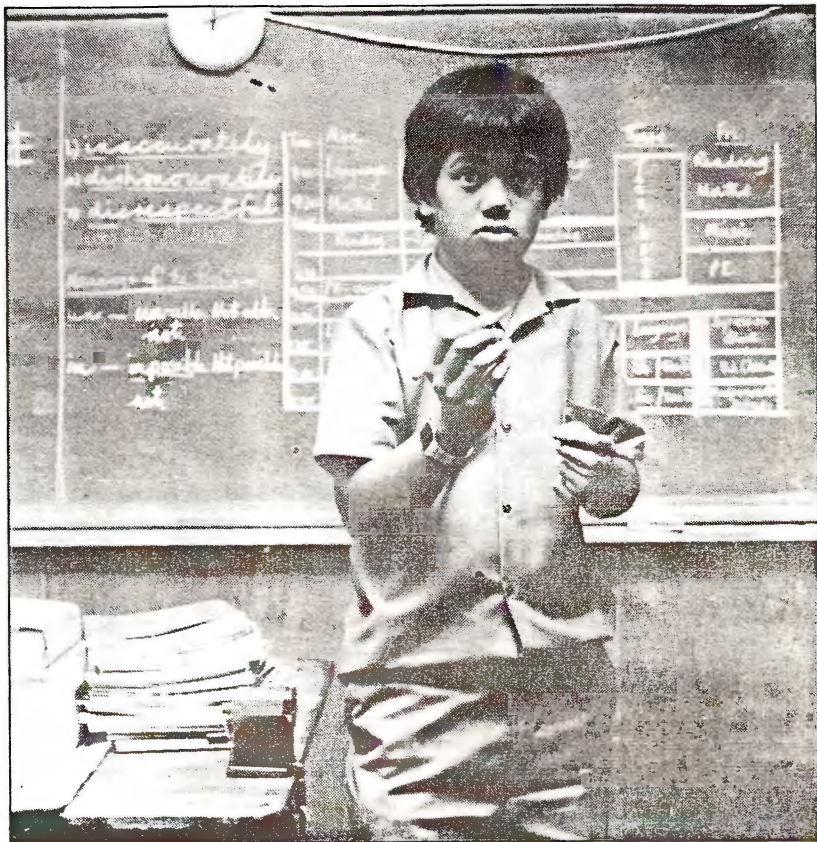
The Pakeha Presence

Almost all positions of power in the education system, at whatever level you look, are held by Pakeha. The staff and/or elected members of the education department, education boards, the PPTA, boards of governors, and the teachers are almost all Pakeha.

It is this overwhelming Pakeha presence that undercuts attempts to meet the needs of the Maori people. The recommendations that are in **He Huarahi**, and those from the hui at Turangawaewae and Waahi in 1984 have all failed to bring about major changes. This is primarily because these recommendations are interpreted and administered, if they are adopted as policy, by Pakeha. The result is misunderstanding, delay, obstruction, and even appropriation for other ends.

Appropriating taha Maori

Recent moves to introduce taha Maori illustrate the process. Despite all the best intentions in the world how can taha Maori permeate schools that are run by Pakeha along Pakeha lines? Are Pakeha teachers to deliver taha Maori? And what about resources? Did the department and PPTA make strong moves to deliver adequate extra staffing for this purpose? No. Did individual schools advertise for staff to fulfill this role? With a few exceptions, no. Other priorities and other agenda prevented this happening as it always has because



Pakeha priorities are different from Maori priorities.

The result has mostly been half-hearted and confused attempts to introduce taha Maori. Maori classes are placed in options alongside other options that are seen as not being part of the real curriculum. Or taha Maori is reduced to small measures such as greetings in class and improved pronunciation of names. These are admirable steps but if they are not seen as part of a wider commitment their unreality is stressed. Having done the greetings, having done the roll call, let's get down to the real business. That's the message delivered. The continuation of Pakeha dominance is ensured by stressing the unimportance of taha Maori. A seeming move towards equality maintains inequality.

Cultural Deficit

Most Pakeha, including those in the education sector, believe in the superiority of our own culture. We believe it to be more relevant to the real world. We believe our cultural norms to be the most natural. It re-

quires a rare exercise of distancing to believe anything else.

The persistence of the cultural deficit theory within New Zealand schools is in part due to this belief in cultural superiority. A folk version of Bernstein's theories lingers on our schools well after they have been largely discredited by Labov and others. Judith Simon's research into primary schools led her to conclude of the schools studied:

"More than half of the total sample of teachers could be seen to subscribe to the 'deficit' ideology". (2)

I believe the deficit theory to be at least as widespread among secondary teachers. It sees Maori children as culturally deprived. It terms their different language patterns as restricted codes which signify restricted cognitive processes. The Maori pupils are seen as problems. The task of the teacher is seen as making up the deficit.

The problem with the cultural deficit theory is that actions arising out of it have a starting point that is unacceptable to those defined as deprived.

"The victims of racism . . . are very quick at detecting negative attitudes . . . There are all kinds of silent language and communication." Ranginui Walker.

One of the disturbing aspects of Judith Simon's work is that it suggests that even well intentioned teachers often start from a cultural deficit viewpoint. If this is the case, they are undermining their work for Maori pupils because it is accompanied by a message that the teacher sees them as culturally deprived.

Pakeha skills are useful to Maori students. I am not arguing they should not be taught or that lower standards should be accepted from Maori students. This acceptance of lower standards is in fact another manifestation of the deficit theory. It is a widespread self-fulfilling prophecy. What I am saying is that the reaching of these skills is best done accompanied by a knowledge of and an expression of the validity of the Maori culture. This starting point affirms the "Maoriness" of the student instead of devaluing it.

I believe that many of us are deceived about our effect on Maori students. We are unable to see the effect of a cultural deficit viewpoint.

Change

Change will only occur through power sharing. The all-pervasive Pakeha presence needs to be offset by a Maori presence at all decision-making levels. Ranginui Walker prefers for this to occur without confrontation.

"You shouldn't have to resort to confrontational tactics to get the systems to modify. I mean the pakeha has got to come to the awareness that we are now in the post-colonial era. It's time to put the mechanisms in place. No-one can quarrel with that agenda so what the hell's the deal?"

It is interesting, however, that all the instances that he gives where some change has occurred involve confrontation. It seems that experience indicates an unwillingness on the part of the Pakeha to share power.

It took political action to bring about a separate board of governors for Hillary College in Otago and to get a significant Maori presence on the Nga Tapuwae Board of Governors.



In both cases there was Pakeha opposition.

A press release was needed to get action on expulsions and suspensions in the Auckland area in the early 1970s. Auckland principals reacted to accusations of racism by "trying to dress us down like naughty schoolboys." Eventually, however, the principals surveyed secondary schools in Auckland and found a high level of suspension and expulsion of Maori students. The result was a decision to explore alternative schooling which led to the establishment of an alternative unit based on kaupapa Maori at Seddon High School.

If power-sharing is to occur, says Ranginui Walker, those Maori in the power structures must be put there by the Maori people. In the past Maori representatives have often been picked by Pakeha.

"OK, the Pakehas at the top meet together and say now who shall we have? The consequences of that kind of process is that the power brokers will pick someone of their own ilk, someone who is accommodating, compliant. I think the time for that kind of paternalistic tokenism is over"

He points out that the **Maori Women's Welfare League** and the **New Zealand Maori Council** are national bodies that should be approached if boards of governors or education boards or the department of education wants Maori representatives. He says of the council:

"The Maori Council is a statutory body. We are expected to co-operate with agencies of the state and we presume the converse holds."

Rawinia Penfold believe there must be much closer contact between schools and their Maori communities for power-sharing to occur. She sees the schools as having responsibilities for initiating that contact.

"The schools must make contact through their Maori teachers, through their Maori parents. Pakeha teachers should go to hui in the area. Go to the Maori people. Don't stand back and say 'come to us'. Teachers are not doing this because they are scared of the unknown and also because of lack of time. But it's also because many teachers don't want real community involvement. They don't want interference."

Both believe a critical part of power-sharing is to have more Maori teachers recruited. Both, however,



express concern about what happens when the teachers go into schools. They believe Maori teachers are under-valued, isolated, and miss out on promotion. They are not nurtured and many leave.

Both believe that there are some Pakeha teachers who are willing to work for change from within the present system. Ranginui comments that a course he runs at the Auckland College of Education has in recent years attracted capacity turnouts.

"But what does bug me is that they are mostly women. Where are the men? See they already know, they already have their careers mapped out. They don't need to know any more. Because the women are an oppressed class they identify with the oppression of the Maori."

Alternative Schooling

Rawinia Penfold believes there is widespread support among Maori people for alternative schooling based on kaupapa Maori running from pre-school through to the end of secondary schooling.

"There is an urgent need for alternative schools here in Auckland. The

immediate need is for schools to carry on the bi-lingual education of children coming out of kohanga reo. They are too young to hold on to their bi-culturalism in ordinary state schools."

Ranginui Walker agrees. He mentions the existing alternative school based at Hoani Waititi marae.

"The Hoani Waititi school is bursting at the seams and Maori parents in West Auckland are looking to establish other bi-lingual schools. Since kohanga reo the demand for bi-lingual schooling has increased exponentially."

The Seddon experience shows the reluctance of the education system to allow the establishment of alternative schools.

"Peter Boag came up to Auckland and said there was no way the Education Act could provide that kind of schooling. This was a lie because Metropolitan College was being established at the very same time. So we took the offer of the unit. We wanted an alternative school but we were powerless."

The reluctance continued today. Alternative schooling based on other grounds like religion is apparently acceptable. Schooling based on kaupapa Maori is apparently separatist and therefore to be opposed.

One of the arguments that is put against alternative schools is that they would allow the mainstream schools to put out of dealing with the needs of Maori students. Rawinia Penfold believes the opposite will apply.

"The Pakeha doesn't give away power easily. It's only when it is hurting that action will happen. If schools start losing pupils to an alternative school they will be forced to improve so they can compete."

The kohanga reo example would seem to support this reasoning. It was only when Maori parents established alternative education that the pre-school and primary areas looked seriously at extending their previous tentative moves towards bi-lingualism.

Our response

Moves towards bi-culturalism because it means giving away power. The Maori people will, as always, have to force us into it.

As Pakeha within the current power structures we have to decide how we are going to respond. Do we work

to maintain the present power imbalance or do we support Maori moves to modify it? PPTA has indicated some willingness to support power sharing. We pushed, at the urging of Maori members, for recognition of Maori based qualifications as meeting entry requirements to secondary teaching. We need to take further steps.

- support moves to increase the presence of Maori people within the power structures. (We have made a start within our own structures.)
- push for adequate staffing and resourcing of moves towards taha Maori within present state schools
- support re-training to expose the existence and effect of cultural deficit theories
- support the establishment of alternative schools based on Maori kaupapa.

The reason for taking these moves should not be the commonly advanced one of social harmony which is often a nice way of saying give them enough to make them happy. It should be the far tougher stance of having an education system and ultimately a society that derives its legitimacy from equity rather than the use of power by the dominant group against the subordinate group.

Notes

¹⁾ This article has been written after talking to Ranginui Walker, Chairman of the Auckland District Maori Council and Associate Professor of Maori Studies at Auckland University; Rawinia Penfold who has been seconded to the Auckland College of Education from her teaching position at Mt Roskill Grammar School; and Judith Simon who holds a post graduate scholarship at Auckland University and is researching the education of Maori children.

A written source was Judith Simon's "Ideology in the Schooling of Maori Children" Delta Research Monograph No. 7, Massey University, which is reviewed elsewhere in this journal and which I would recommend as essential reading.

²⁾ For a discussion see Judith Simons op. cit. Chapt. 4

³⁾ Judith Simons op. cit. p37. ■