

## Equity and Curriculum Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand

### Challenges, Opportunities, Uncertainties

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#### ABSTRACT

Recent educational reforms in Aotearoa New Zealand have pursued concurrently both equity and choice as social goals. Although these two goals are somewhat paradoxical, Māori (indigenous) education has made some rapid advances under the reforms, especially in the field of curriculum development. Current curriculum reform has been primarily concerned with equity, especially in the area of Māori education. The writing of curriculum statements in Māori can be seen as being consistent with current political trends as well as showing support for educational initiatives taken by Māori over the last decade or so. Only ten years ago it would have been impossible for Māori to 'speak' in this way, that is, through an official policy text in Māori. Yet it is for the very same reasons that prevented Māori from speaking then that allows Māori to speak today. While the writing of national curriculum documents in Māori appear to be equitable in supporting Māori language and cultural initiatives in education, the concept of Māori control of Māori education is still a long way from being realised. This paper outlines the background to current debates and development work in language, culture and curriculum documents, with specific reference to science education, in Aotearoa New Zealand.

#### Introduction

The decision to write national curriculum documents in Māori in 1992 was a landmark decision in Aotearoa New Zealand educational policy. Never before had any national curriculum statements been written in Māori, not even the previous syllabii for learning Māori as a language in schools. At present, the government has undertaken the production of three statements, namely Te Reo Māori (Māori language), Pūtaiao (Science) and Pangarau (Mathematics), with indications that the entire range of learning areas in schools will be written in Māori. These documents form an integral part of the total curriculum revamp that is occurring at this time. The current changes include a restructuring of

the framework of what is learned in schools along with curriculum statements for each of the designated learning areas. All these documents together form the policy on curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a result of writing curricula in Māori, the government have shifted their 'official stance' on education through the medium of Māori, from providing only English documents to now providing documents written in Māori and English.

At first glance, there are some curious aspects about the development of curriculum documents in Māori. For example, they have been produced by a National government - a political party not known historically for Māori educational initiatives - and in a political environment where the 'new right' discourse guides our preparation for entry into the

twenty first century. In addition, because they are written in Māori, they have been designed for Māori immersion and bilingual programmes which only account for 14.7% of all Māori primary school children and 7% of all Māori secondary school students or, alternatively, approximately 2% of the total student population in primary and secondary schools. In numbers this equates to approximately thirteen thousand students out of a total number of one hundred and twenty four thousand Māori students, or the total of six hundred and fifty one thousand students in our primary and secondary schools (Davies & Nicholl, 1993).

The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the complex issues involved with working at the intersection of political activism and Māori educational policy development and, in particular, curriculum statements. Much of past Māori educational efforts have been directed towards the establishment of kohanga reo<sup>1</sup> and kura kaupapa<sup>2</sup> and immersion schools<sup>3</sup>. However, with these schooling initiatives now having been established for well over a decade, it is time for us to critically reflect on our achievements and widen our attention to other areas of concern. That is not to say that more work is not needed in these initiatives, far from it, they still require a huge commitment from those involved. Kohanga reo, kura kaupapa and immersion programmes will always form central part of Māori education development, however, the political climate has changed since their establishment which requires us to re-evaluate some of the issues involved.

For many years, Māori have been lobbying for autonomy in all aspects of policy that affect them, and especially in educational matters. The establishment of kura kaupapa and kohanga reo, which were originally set up outside the mainstream education system as 'private' schools, were seen as a means to have autonomy. Māori have attacked education with a sense of purpose and unity not often seen in educational initiatives in this country, or anywhere else for that matter, at the 'grass roots' level. However, we now find that after taking on the strategy of arguing through equity, and settling in for the long haul

that the convincing would require, the government has shifted their position quickly to catch us seemingly unaware and given us, to some extent, what we have argued for.

#### The Māori Political Context

Through the late 1960s and 1970s, Aotearoa New Zealand witnessed the social movement of organised groups, such as Ngā Tamatoa, that worked to legitimise those things that characterise them and make them different from other groups in society. Ranginui Walker (1987) has described 1970s, with their protest politics, as "ngā tau tohetohe" (the years of anger). These groups were demanding that attention be given to Māori issues such as land, education, justice, employment and autonomy by questioning existing assumptions (Awatere, 1984). As a result of growing dissatisfaction among Māori, the Waitangi Tribunal was established in 1975 to hear grievances by Māori against the Crown. Although it had no legal mandate, it was able to make recommendations to the government of the day. Most importantly, however, the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal was an 'official' recognition by government that there were inequalities in all spheres of society that were interrelated and impinging on every aspect of Māori life.

The early 1980s saw a world wide movement among minority groups to revive their language and culture. Aotearoa New Zealand saw the momentum from the 1970s impel a new wave of political discourse linked to the partnership rights guaranteed under the Treaty of Waitangi. Grievances taken to the Waitangi Tribunal included allegations of land

wrongfully taken by earlier governments, fishing rights, control over a portion of publically funded television and radio time, a share of the nation's airwaves, the role of the state in the decline of Māori language, and the number of Māori seats in Parliament. Māori issues had become political issues. As Jefferies (1993) has stated, 'a general sense of Māori nationalism emerged and there was a push by Māori to have more control over the institutions and systems that had a major impact on the way they lived' (p2). Government policies needed to better reflect the needs of Māori.

At the same time as wider societal assumptions were being questioned and challenged, education was undergoing challenges of its own. The establishment of Te Kohanga Reo in 1981 emerged for several reasons, including the historical inability of the education system to maintain Māori language and culture, and to give Māori control of Māori education (Irwin, 1990). Following on from this movement, we saw an emergence of a new concept in primary education, namely Kura Kaupapa Māori in 1985. Again this system was established outside the mainstream education system. The signal to government was clear - the education system was not catering for Māori students. The concept of equal opportunity, and the policies introduced in support of it, was being

deemed as inadequate in the face of persistent social differences in access to education. What seemed to find favour among Māori educationalists, as well as other groups in similar positions, was a new term, namely 'equity'.

#### Equity and Māori Educational Policy

Recent official policy in Aotearoa New Zealand has seen two distinct discourses on 'equity'. The two discourses on equal opportunity for all can be loosely termed 'liberal right' and 'liberal left' (Jones et al, 1992). What distinguishes them is not the goal of equal educational opportunity in its broadest sense, but the methods that are used to achieve that goal. The 'liberal right' argue that less state intervention and more local control leads to a more equitable system, whereby the 'liberal left' argue that state intervention on behalf of disadvantaged groups is fairer and essential to ensure equal opportunity. However, despite these somewhat differing positions, both have arisen from a market-liberal drive in educational policy.

Equity, in some form, is necessary in the free market economies model of education provision as customer choice is the controlling factor. The market-liberal model relies on the full participation of societal members because the market will not be fully realised if large and/or significant groups, such as Māori, do not participate in it. In addition, Nash (1993) has argued that the under representation of talented Māori (or any other group for that matter) in tertiary education systems constitutes, firstly, an inefficient use of human resources and, secondly, a potential threat to the social order with the possibility of resentment and opposition in their non-legitimated exclusion. There is evidence in recent educational policy to support such arguments, although the issue of Māori education has been dealt with through different means by different governments of the day.

With the re-election of the Fourth Labour government in 1987, education became part of the reform agenda. The government established a taskforce to review education administration (known as the Picot Committee). This resulted in the policy document *Tomorrows Schools* (1989). The document tried to counter the notion of equality of outcomes by targeting a number of areas of concern to Māori : school charters, the 'opting out' clause, provision for the co-option of school board members to reflect the ethnic makeup of the student body,

provision for appointing non-certificated teachers of Māori language and culture, and the inclusion of the Māori Language Factor fund (Jefferies, 1993).

School charters were very significant in that they represented a legal agreement between the school's Board of Trustees and the Minister of Education as to the parameters within which each school must operate.

In the charters is a 'liberal left' definition of 'equity'. It states "[equity] is the application of the principles of fairness. In schools it involves the provision of unequal resources to students so that fairer outcomes can be achieved." (Jefferies, 1993, p23). That is, in order to ensure all students can participate and succeed in a full range of school activities, the school might need to treat students differently in order to redress previous imbalances. Much of the charter consisted of compulsory sections which every school had to include. One of the compulsory sections addressed the Treaty of Waitangi, with the Implementation Unit of the Ministry of Education providing a standard statement for schools to follow. The statement read :

Goal : To fulfil the intent of the Treaty of Waitangi by valuing and reflecting New Zealand's dual cultural heritage.

Objectives : Every year prepare policies which will :

- aEnsure the curriculum reflects Māori perspectives.
- bMake equitable provisions in the curriculum for the instructional needs of Māori children.
- cProvide opportunities for students who wish to learn the Māori language and culture.
- dProvide for students whose parents wish them to be educated through the Māori language.
- eRecognise Māori values in the provision of resources and facilities within the school.
- fMake staffing or financial provisions to enable the school to meet the requirements of a-e above.

Clearly, although the Labour Government thought schools could operate more like businesses, they believed 'equity' was not going to come about without some form of government intervention. In addition to the charter being a matter of words, it became part of the audit of the school through reviews carried out by the Education Review Office (ERO). Hence, schools actually had to follow through with the charter or face criticism from the ERO on review.

With the change of government in 1990, the equity provisions in charters began to be seen differently. The new Minister of Education, Dr Lockwood Smith, made suggestions that the equity and Treaty of Waitangi provisions in the charter would no longer be compulsory. Although regulations were never changed, the ERO review format was changed so that the charter no longer occupied an all important position in the review of schools. These changes can be seen as representing a different view of equity to that one which the Labour government held when it set up the policy. By taking the focus off the charter, and hence the equity and Treaty of Waitangi clauses, the withdrawal of government intervention in these matters is clearly signalled. Any adherence to 'equity' in the broadest sense now becomes

a 'community choice'. Choice, in this instance, means that if the majority of the people who send their children to a particular school vote for equity and the Treaty of Waitangi to be issues then it will be incorporated into school policy. However, they can 'choose' not to make them issues as well and, hence, not address them to any great extent.

Most schools have opted to keep the clause but there is no doubt the focus has gone for many. For Māori, the purpose of this clause was to act as a 'safe-guard' for Māori children in mainstream schools in challenging hidden assumptions, not for Māori immersion education where the Treaty of Waitangi only has meaning in its dealings with Pākehā.

Another key feature of Tomorrow's Schools, as mentioned before, is the 'opting out' clause. This gave provision of a procedure for Māori (or any other disaffected group) to develop alternative systems. When read in conjunction with the charter provisions, it would seem that this clause was one dealing with the 'reality of the situation' and, perhaps, seen as an interim measure - although the policy does not state this. To make sense of this one needs to consider the relating factors. On the one hand we have disaffected Māori saying the education system is not working for their children, and that Māori language and culture is the means by which the problem can be addressed. And, on the other hand, we have a review group saying that the education system must be made to work for Māori (charter provisions) but will probably respond too slowly to Māori demands (the opt out clause). But with the charter provisions revoked with a change in government, then the 'opt out' clause stands alone. An interpretation of this must be the devolving of responsibility by government and, as Penetito (1986) would describe, take an 'evolutionary line of development'. That is, put the problem back where it is perceived to belong - with Māori - and let consumer choice in the market place decide on Māori development in the mainstream education system.

#### Māori Development and the 'New Right'

Despite the changes in equity relating to educational policy texts, the current government can be seen as having undertaken initiatives to develop Māori immersion education, if not transforming the mainstream education system to cope with Māori demands. The writing of national curriculum documents can be seen as an illustration of this point. These documents are aimed at immersion Māori education. In addition, the establishment of Te Puni Kōkiri whose purpose is "to assist in developing an environment of opportunity and choice for tangata whenua (indigenous peoples, in this case Māori), consistent with the Treaty of Waitangi" (Te Puni Kōkiri, 1992, p6). Although this establishment is a political arm of the government, we can not ignore the fact that such a structure has a government mandate to carry out desperately needed research into Māori education. Such projects include an immersion secondary school within an established mainstream school, distant

learning for geographically isolated Māori schools and communities, science camps for young Māori, mathematics education, and assessment procedures in schools, to name but a few. Te Puni Kōkiri is also now in a position to ensure all policy takes into account Māori concerns, as policy passes through their organisation. Although such organisations will always be problematic, what is important is that we must acknowledge what is possible through such structures and, at the same time, be aware of their weaknesses and plan to minimise them, if not eliminate them altogether.

However, although it is important to critique new and current ideas to indicate areas of weakness, omission and assumption, it is equally important to acknowledge ideas of merit. As Nash (1988) has written, the stance of the 'left' as we have come to know it versus the 'new right' is not necessarily a useful means of looking at the problem. It would be difficult to deny that some ideas emerging in policy from the 'new right' have not proven to advance Māori education in some areas. Those who support Māori sovereignty (Awatere, 1984) do not see these new policies as an issue as they just represent the continuation of the

'oppressor' subjecting the 'oppressed' to further colonisation. For those more inclined to support left wing politics, such emphases on individualism, choice and property rights are abhorrent in the name of collectivism. But Māori, in the past and present, have shown themselves to be all these things. In addition, many Māori educationalists have written of the inequities of the present education system, and of middle class capture. The mantle of 'Māori' proves to be problematic. For some Māori groups and individuals the changes are seen as good, for others not so promising - one solution, be it in education, health or business, is never going to solve all the problems.

Under current policies, Māori have been seen as an untapped market resource. As a result of this interpretation, kohanga reo and kura kaupapa have become government funded as an investment. In addition, Te Puni Kōkiri (Māori Development Corporation), a completely government funded organisation, has been created to further Māori initiatives (under current structuring). Other government departments have made dramatic changes, such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs with their parallel structural organisation, and the Ministry of Education and New Zealand Qualifications Authority both have Māori education groups within them. Māori positioning to have greater input into policy making has been increased by the government themselves. However, the interpretation of equity is quite different from that which was originally intended (Gilbert, 1993). As a result, we need to focus on these changed, and changing, positions of government with respect to Māori education. As part of the changes made by government, we now find that the state and Māori recognise that culture and language have the potential to transform Māori society. This action contributes to the 'appearance' of the state giving Māori what they have argued for.

Although differences between the state and Māori initiatives may have been obvious in the 1980s, the gap is now far less easy to conceptualise.

#### Developing the Curriculum Documents

The developing of the curriculum documents have presented many challenges to both Māori and the government. I will use the science curriculum document to illustrate some of the issues that have arisen from the initiative. Some of the challenges were relatively easy to solve, others hover in the background to emerge another day, while yet others are being hotly debated over as the developments continue. Some of the debates are being carried out in 'Māoridom' and others are being contested across the divide between government and Māori/Pākehā and Māori. However, it is fair to say that many Māori have seen the curriculum initiative in Māori as the best thing that has happened to Māori education (that is, initiated by the government) for a long time despite the thorns that are contained within it.

The science curriculum document, as has the maths document, has been produced after the final versions of the equivalent documents in English. As a result, certain constraints were placed on the writing of them. In essence, the construct of the curriculum, the knowledge contained within and the implied pedagogy, were all part of what had to be kept. The Māori documents had to "maintain the achievement objectives" (Ministry of Education, 1993) already laid out in the English documents, however, what went with that was the entire structure of the document. For this reason, it is argued by some Māori, with some justification, that it is still not a comprehensive curriculum for kura kaupapa Māori as it does not address the issue of the teaching of Māori knowledge from a Māori perspective. Any Māori knowledge Māori wish to teach in their schools is treated as an

addition in these documents. In other words, Pākehā decision makers got to choose what became central to each curricula. This brings into question two notions that have been taken for granted for many years now, one bearing on the relationship between the state and Māori educational initiatives, and one that bears reflection by Māori.

The first issue that is being challenged is the accepted notion of a national curriculum. Unlike other countries, Aotearoa New Zealand has never really debated not having a national curriculum. The most commonsense argument accepted is that our country is small, both geographically and in population, and that we are a very mobile people. This enables our children to shift from school to school and basically pick up where they left off. Māori are challenging this concept with iwi development in education, with initiatives such as the Tainui Education Plan, and of knowledge being specific to particular groups of



people. This brings us to the second issue to be raised, and one that we need to think carefully about, and that is where this path of specific Māori knowledge as a separate entity is leading us to. As Harding (1986) has noted, often differences that correlate with race differences are conceptualised as racial differences.

The writing of curriculum statements has always involved implicit assumptions about worthwhile knowledge to be learned. That requires us to look at the shifting nature of the political relationships that have been and continue to be established in the field of curriculum theory. Māori have argued that previous curriculum statements have only represented a partial view of knowledge and have continued to ignore Māori knowledge. This has, it has been argued, the effect of disadvantaging and alienating Māori people by not making Māori knowledge accessible to Māori students. The argument continues that Māori knowledge is specific to, and hence highly relevant, suitable and necessary for Māori to learn. It is a very contentious argument and a number of important issues are raised that need to be explored. One such issue is that of identity politics and the problems of simultaneous identification with more than one group. The idea of group knowledge gives rise to the notion of competing interest groups and becomes a site of contestation about the value of that knowledge. The writing of Māori curriculum documents, based on their 'parallel' English versions, does not fulfill Māori aspirations with respect to knowledge because, it is argued, they did not emerge from a Māori philosophical base. Exploration of the issues involved in curriculum knowledge needs to be done to form a more stable foundation on which to build future curriculum developments.

However, what may even be worse than what has been mentioned above are the hidden implications of the 'construct of the curriculum'. The model that has been used is that of 'behaviourist theory'. Critiques of behaviourist theory, and its association with individualism and mental testing, abound. What Māori need to consider is that are we creating a Māori elite? Sociologists tell us that the type of model used in the document leads to a stratified society. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori fill the bottom rungs of that society generally. Many have argued that 'the education system' employed by the state is responsible for that. If we transfer the model into Māori schools are we then going to stratify Māori society in the same manner, that is, produce an elite? And if we do, does it matter? What are the implications? We may get more Māori included in positions of decision making in a hierarchical system, but at what price? Will the benefits outweigh the negatives? Can we view this as another form of colonialism in our supposedly post-colonial world? A lot of thought needs to go into this yet.

One of the more immediate challenges that went out to Māori was in the form of language development, especially in the areas of technical

terminology. This is an issue that never occurs in English documents as the creation of new language to explain concepts is an ongoing and negotiated over periods of time. Scientists have worked on the English language for hundreds of years to get the precision of language that science has deemed necessary to explain itself (Rampal, 1992), borrowing from both 'dead' and other 'alive' languages. This coinage has resulted in a move to detach and disembodify any reflections of subjectivity in the discourse of science. The terminology in science has become finely differentiated with precise definitions for the concepts that evolved, for example, velocity, speed, momentum and inertia all relating to the notion of movement. In contrast to this is the expressive form of communication used in oral languages, in which Māori has its basis. This is not to say that the Māori language is underdeveloped, quite the contrary, in some respects. For example, Māori has 150 words for eel as each word carries with it a different context relating to size, location and time. However, to include the language of science in the document in Māori required an enormous development effort. In the space of six months, nearly 800 new Māori words with scientific meanings were developed. There is no question that Māori parents do not want their children to learn science concepts. Although the task of finding language to express the concepts in the document was relatively easy to fix, it is not without its difficulties.

On the surface, the development of new words may seem relatively minor to other people but to Māori it has implicated some larger issues. One is the standardisation of language. Māori society is tribally based with each tribe having their own dialect, although dialects are not so disparate that Māori from different tribal areas can not understand each other. The Māori Language Commission, a government funded body set up to help develop the Māori language, played a large part in helping to develop the terminology needed. The Commission does not have the sanction of all Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, in fact, some Māori view it with open scepticism. The issue of standardisation is an issue Māori have avoided in the past. However, the position is getting more and more difficult to maintain. The writing of the curriculum documents has not helped to avoid the issue. It is interesting in that when the science document was being written there was no debate on 'whose language would be used'. Everyone accepted that the resulting document would be 'a cosmopolitan language', that is, words would be used from all dialects at different times. However, the issue of standardisation is one that is hovering in the background and will need to be debated eventually. Subjects like science and mathematics only serve to highlight the issue.

The last issue, but by no means the least, I wish to raise is that of resourcing. This is a challenge to government. At present, Māori schools are drastically under resourced. We do not have enough productions in Māori to cover a reading programme let alone for Māori children to be able to read about science in Māori. One of the biggest

problems we face is the number of children learning in Māori is still very small. This means established publishers do not enter the market because it is not viable. The production of these curricula obligates the government in this matter. If they sanction learning through the medium of Māori, as they do with funding these schools and with the production of curriculum documents, then they need to look towards providing support for these initiatives.

### Conclusion

The issues put up here are by no means a definitive list. All they do is highlight some of the issues and challenges that this development

has brought forward to be dealt with. The challenges are to Māori as much as they are to the government. In conclusion, I do not wish you to go away with a negative impression of the development. As I said before, I personally believe it is good despite the thorns. It was an opportunity I believed we needed to take, despite the 'reality' falling short of the vision. There are some very valid reasons as to why we did this. Firstly, the document will become a rich resource for teachers who are currently coping in Māori immersion schools under horrific conditions with respect to resources compared to their mainstream counterparts. The resource will be there in terms of language in science, which will save teachers literally hours of preparation each day, and ideas for teaching. Secondly, the writing of the science document will help to develop and strengthen the language in an increasingly and fast changing scientific and technological world - to make it live a little more. Māori needed this development despite the underlying implication that in doing so Māori may be advancing the case of further colonisation. Thirdly, the writing of the document is a method of teacher development for Māori teachers who have been denied access to this type, and level, of curriculum development for many years. And last, but not least, in the past Aotearoa New Zealand national curriculum documents have been reviewed every 12 to 15 years. Māori now see these documents written in Māori as part of that automatic review process. Hence, these documents come to be viewed as a start, not an end.

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1 Kohanga Reo literally means 'language nest'. This was a Mäori  
educational initiative that began outside the national education  
system. The first was established in 1982 and in 1994 total around 600  
with 44% of all Mäori children attending them.

2 Kura kaupapa Mäori arose out of the kohanga reo system. They mostly  
cater for the primary age group (5-12 years), although some have now  
extended into secondary areas (13-18 years). Kura kaupapa and kohanga  
reo make things Mäori as the central part of their operations.

3 The distinction has been made here as total immersion Mäori schools

have arisen from 'regular stream' schools that have gradually, over a number of years and through various processes, turned to Māori immersion programmes.

4 Pākehā is a Māori term that generally refers to non Māori New Zealanders