

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

The primary objective of this thesis focused upon whether the recent introduction of the Parents as First Teachers programme in Aotearoa is an emancipatory model for Maori people. I set out to examine this question because I became aware, through literature outlining the programme, that Maori people were being targeted as recipients of the policy. The thesis has argued that Parents as First Teachers is not an emancipatory model for Maori people, rather the underlying assumptions within its construction serve to maintain and perpetuate structural inequalities which oppress Maori people.

The notion of "emancipation" is considered critical to a discussion of policies which affect Maori, because it challenges dominant discourses which promote the neutrality of educational structures and policies. Furthermore, it brings into play notions of conscientisation, struggle, contestation and operates from a realisation of the dialectical relationship between theory

and practice. Therefore, the notion of "emancipation" provides a conceptual framework through which to analyse policy developments pertaining to Maori people.

It is not intended that this thesis stand as a definitive statement in regard to the programme as there remain areas that require further discussion and analysis. As stated in the introduction, questions surrounding economic factors have not been addressed in this thesis. It is also stated that the oppression of Maori people is not solely ideological (refer chapter three), but is also expressed through economic constraints. The reduction in funding for under 2's and the introduction of bulk funding to Kindergartens raises questions as to the economic intentions of the National government, for the early childhood sector. Furthermore, questions need to be raised as to the intentions, and potential impact of, these economic strategies for Maori people and Maori initiatives.

Further excluded within the thesis is discussion that is content or evaluation specific. The fact that I have not attempted to outline the content of the programme and evaluation techniques and processes in any specific detail may be viewed by some as a weakness. Analysing these areas is, perhaps, a job for others. However, in acknowledging the exclusion of these aspects I do not believe that to be a weakness, rather I see that this thesis provides a critical analysis which calls into question the basic assumptions for the programme and hence opens the doors for further analysis.

Seeking to reveal the underlying assumptions within educational policies serves to expose the power relations that are at play. Such an approach to policy analysis is useful for Maori in that it works to deconstruct and expose both the implicit and explicit agendas inherent within the policy. Operating from a theoretical approach recognises that all practice is theory laden and therefore can not be seen as isolated from its theoretical context. For Maori people, who experience the imposition of dominant group constructed policies, such a process is crucial, as in order to view educational policies in their entirety we must have an understanding of the theoretical frameworks upon which it is constructed.

The key theoretical frameworks engaged with, in the thesis, have been positioned under two broad theoretical umbrellas (i) Positivism (refer chapter two) and (ii) Critical theory (refer chapter three). The remaining chapters discussing early childhood education (chapter four), Head Start, the Missouri Project (chapter five) and Parents as First Teachers (chapters six and seven) involve analysis of the underlying assumptions and identification of the theoretical frameworks which have influenced these developments.

It is argued that within the positivist paradigm theoretical developments from biological to environmental determinism marked a shift from internal to external factors. However, in relation to Maori people there remains a strong connection between the two paradigms. Both paradigms maintain an underlying assumption that

dominant Pakeha culture is 'superior' to Maori cultural norms, an assumption that is justified through the paradigms themselves, through the imposition of 'scientific' techniques such as intelligence testing. Constructed by the dominant group to explain and maintain societal inequalities biological determinism and environmentalism both serve to marginalise and invisibilise Maori epistemological perceptions of the world. Within such constructions Te Reo and Tikanga Maori have been defined as 'inferior', 'imperfect', 'obtrusive' and have been marginalised to the extent that Te Reo Maori has been on the brink of extinction.

It is also contended that critical theories have provided frameworks for the exposing of inequalities that are perpetuated through positivist models and the revealing of injustices that exist in societies such as ours. Reproduction and resistance theories allow analysis of the structural inequalities that operate to ensure the maintenance of a status quo that serves the interests of some groups over others. However, theories are themselves social constructions and therefore can not be assumed to be 'full proof', such is the momentum for the ongoing revisiting of theory and practice to further define and redefine the parameters.

In this thesis I have argued that Kaupapa Maori theory is an indigenous paradigm, based within Maori epistemologies, and which operates from Maori culturally preferred methodologies and pedagogies. It is further stated that Kaupapa Maori theory

provides a framework from which to actively critique dominant discourses that marginalise Maori people (refer chapter three). Whilst it too is a social construction it is one which connects with the social realities of Maori people drawing upon a traditional knowledge base whilst visiting and revisiting critical theoretical paradigms.

Kaupapa Maori theory takes for granted the centrality of Te Reo and Tikanga Maori and asserts their legitimacy. The reassertion of Maori epistemologies is not however unproblematic. Historical experiences of Maori people and the imposition of dominant group ideologies and practices over the past 153 years has, at times, influenced the construction of Te Reo Maori and tikanga. Therefore, the deconstruction and reconstruction processes that must occur in the assertion of Kaupapa Maori theory must be defined and controlled by Maori people themselves.

The discussion of Kaupapa Maori theory within this thesis does not pretend to be absolute, rather it remains a contribution to a growing body of knowledge that is articulated daily by Maori people throughout the country. Neither does it claim to be a definitive statement on behalf of any particular Iwi. The literature pertaining to Kaupapa Maori drawn upon within this thesis derives from Maori writers who encompass a range of Iwi affiliations and therefore this writing should not be interpreted as Iwi specific. The thesis is based upon a fundamental belief in the right of Maori people to define, construct and control educational institutions within our own cultural frameworks.

Kaupapa Maori theory is itself inseparable from Kaupapa Maori practice. This "dialectical unity" can be seen in the expressions of Maori people in relation to the care and education of children. Maori children are inexplicably bound to Papatuanuku and are linked through Whakapapa to the past, present and future. Maori children are the future, therefore their care and education is of utmost importance.

As examined in chapter four, the involvement of Maori people in formalised Pakeha Early Childhood institutions was minimal up until the establishment of Te Kohanga Reo in the early 1980s. Family Play Groups in the seventies emerged as an attempt by Maori people to take control of the decision-making processes that impacted upon the education of Maori children, however, their positioning within Pakeha structures limited their effectiveness. Hence the development of Te Kohanga Reo outside of existing structures.

As maintained by Rangmarie Rose Pere (1986) Te Kohanga Reo is the closest model to a "traditional Maori ecological base", and stands as model that brings to life Maori aspirations for the defining and construction of Maori educational services that meet the needs of Maori people. Through their withdrawal from the mainstream Pakeha education system Maori people have voiced their opposition to dominant ideologies that construct Te Reo and Tikanga Maori as 'inferior' and have actively drawn upon their own cultural resources to sustain what may be considered an act of resistance.

Te Kohanga Reo is a vehicle through which Maori people are seeking to transform an oppressive social reality through the explicit validation and legitimation of Te Reo and Tikanga Maori. Te Kohanga Reo is an institution which has contributed significantly to the conscientisation and politicisation of Maori people. As such Te Kohanga Reo stands clearly as an emancipatory model where PAFT does not.

PARENTS AS FIRST TEACHERS

This thesis has argued that both biological determinism and environmental theories are based within dominant group ideologies which have served to maintain and perpetuate the subordinate positioning of Maori people. It has also outlined that compensatory education is founded upon 'deficit', 'victim-blaming' scenarios that assume the inferiority of Te Reo and Tikanga Maori, further advancing a notion of assimilation.

It is further argued that the Parents as First Teachers programme is located within a compensatory framework. The impetus for 'change', within the programme, is located in the environment of the family and blame for failure is apportioned to the parents and children. What is appropriate parenting has been defined within dominant group belief systems of what constitutes 'correct' methods and pedagogies for the care and education of young children. Maori expressions surrounding the early education of Maori children are disregarded within the programme.

This points clearly to a continuation of assimilatory projects that advocate the mediocrity of Maori epistemologies.

Maori people are being targeted for participation in a programme that has been constructed to promote their assimilation into dominant group beliefs and practices. Just as "Trojan horse" strategies were employed to introduce Pakeha habits and lifestyles to Maori communities, PAFT is a vehicle through which dominant Pakeha cultural norms are to be transmitted to Maori parents and Maori children. PAFT is therefore a mechanism of dominant group cultural reproduction.

Drawing upon Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, it may be established that PAFT will ultimately benefit those who hold the necessary cultural capital to access fully the programme and its resources. Therefore PAFT will serve to maintain the structural inequalities that position Pakeha as the dominant group and Maori in a subordinate role.

However, the relationship of Maori people to programmes such as PAFT is more complex than one of simple reproduction. As Ranginui Walker (1984) and Judith Simon (1986, 1990) have articulated, many Maori people have actively resisted educational policies imposed by the dominant group. PAFT will not be free of such Maori resistance. The Maori facilitators employed by Plunket will play a key role in how Maori people receive, and participate in, the programme. Furthermore, Maori people have become adept at taking from programmes that which they determine as necessary to meet their own needs. Therefore any future 'success', of

Maori people, that is accorded to the programme must be seen in light of the ways in which Maori people have adapted and manipulated the programme to serve their own interests.

A further problematic in attributing 'successful' outcomes of the programme is the attendance of Maori children at Te Kohanga Reo whilst on the programme. Who will determine to what extent the influence of Te Kohanga Reo will be accounted for? It is my contention that in light of the programme being constructed within Pakeha frameworks Te Kohanga Reo will remain marginalised in the evaluation processes of the programme.

PAFT is clearly not an emancipatory programme for Maori people. The theoretical underpinnings of the programme are located within 'deprivation' theories that provided the basis of educational policies in this country some twenty years ago. Structural inequalities that perpetuate the suppression of Maori people remain unchallenged and are therefore assumed to be the 'natural order'. Themes of language deprivation, cultural disadvantage and deficit theories are expressed implicitly throughout the programme literature and are instrumental in the marginalisation of Maori people, Te Reo and Tikanga Maori. As such the programme is constructed in conflict with educational initiatives such as Te Kohanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Maori, through which Maori people seek the validation and legitimation of Maori epistemologies.

FUTURE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Historically education policy in Aotearoa has been defined and developed by the dominant group, couched within Pakeha perceptions of what is appropriate education for Maori people. The continued high Maori failure rates within the Pakeha system highlights that past policies have been ineffectual.

In order for future educational policy to be effective for Maori people, within mainstream Pakeha education, there must first occur a shift in dominant power relations which marginalise Maori aspirations and initiatives. Policies developed from 'deficit', 'assimilatory' frameworks have not work for Maori people as they undermine fundamental bases of Maori societal structures, Te Reo and Tikanga Maori. Only when policies are constructed within Maori culturally preferred methodologies and pedagogies will they be of benefit to Maori people.

The establishment of Te Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori outside Pakeha educational structures emphasise Maori intentions to take control of the methodologies and pedagogies related to the learning and teaching of Maori children. The disregarding of these 'successful' Maori models may be construed as a case of selective social amnesia.

In light of Dr Smith's recent press statements on the success of PAFT, preempting the completion of the formal evaluation of the programme, it would appear that the determination for PAFT to be

successful supercedes any consideration of programmes such as Te Kohanga Reo (Moore 1993). Whilst this social amnesia works in the interests of dominant discourses it becomes for Maori a site of further struggle. Future policy development is still dependent on how Maori interests are struggled for and must first and foremost take into account Maori aspirations for the education of their children. Until such time as Maori people retain decision making power and control of the definitions and construction of educational policy pertaining to Maori education this area will remain a site of contestation.

KA PAI TE WHAKATO O NGA PURAPURA

KA PAI TE PUAWAITANGA

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