

TUNGIA TE URURUA, KIA TUPU
WHAKARITORITO TE TUPU O TE HARAKEKE:
A Critical Analysis of Parents as
First Teachers

by

Leonie E. Pihama

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EDITORS COMMENTARY.

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This thesis is one of several Maori theses which the Research Unit for Maori Education considers to be important work which ought to be read widely.

The intention is to make the research undertaken by Maori students available to other Maori students particularly and to other Maori people generally, especially those who may have been directly associated with the research. This is a 'ngawari' kaupapa, developed in response to the cultural obligation implicit within notions of reciprocity (utu, koha) - the responsibility to return gifts and favours. In this sense this represents an effort to return the research, knowledge and understandings to those who have contributed or indeed who may be affected in some way by the research.

This type of thinking is couched within Maori preferred frameworks in relation to knowledge. For example, an ideological framework that holds that knowledge belongs to the whole group; that individuals only 'own' knowledge in so far as it ought to be used to the benefit of others; that individuals have a responsibility to share knowledge; that knowledge is not a privatised good or an individual property. This kind of thinking sits within the epistemological base of what has been generalised as 'kaupapa Maori'.

This series of published theses has been completed by Maori Masters students within the Department of Education at the University of Auckland. This is a non profit exercise, the overall concern being to get these works published so that they can be read widely, and that the valuable knowledge and understandings contained within them are accessible.

No reira, e hoa ma, aroha mai, awhi mai ki tou ratou mahi. Ma maatou, ma koutou, ma taatou katoa ka ora ai te iwi Maori.

Graham Hingangaroa Smith
Margie Kahukura Hohepa
(Series Editors)

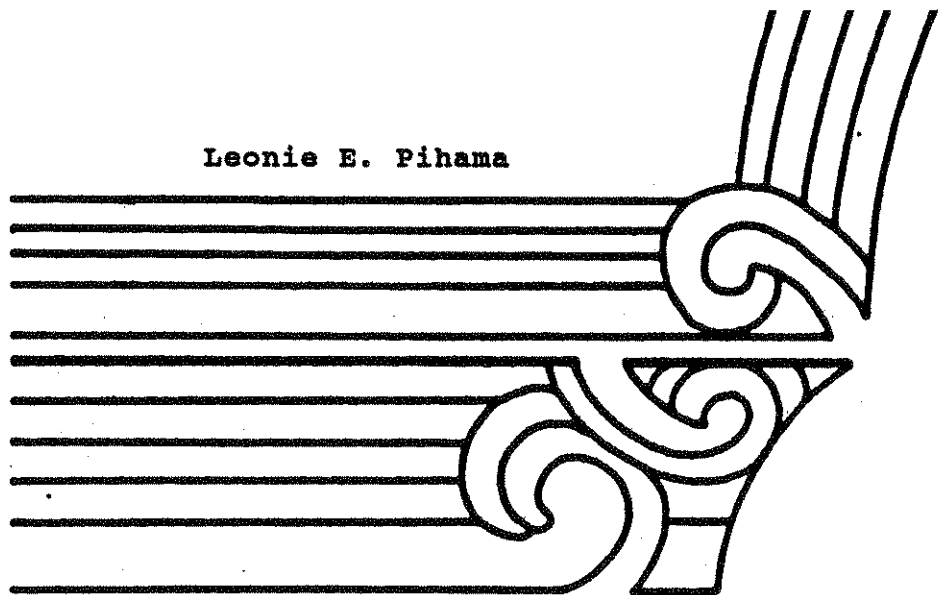
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**TUNGIA TE URURUA, KIA TUPU
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**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
PARENTS AS FIRST TEACHERS**

Leonie E. Pihama



**A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education**

February 1993

MAURI

Mauri hikitia

Mauri hapainga

Hautu ko te ora

E hika ma

Awhitia te whenua

Titiro ki te ra

Ki nga whetu tiaho o te rangi

Ko te oranga tuturu

Kia mau

Hikitia hapainga

Kia kaha

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Titiro au ki te maunga o Taranaki

e tu e tu e tu

Ko au te mokopuna e mihi atu nei

Aroha mai Tautoko mai Manaaki mai

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Nau te rourou

Naku te rourou

Ka ora e te iwi e

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this thesis focused upon whether the recent introduction of the 'Parents as First Teachers' programme in Aotearoa is an emancipatory programme for Maori people. Argued from a theoretical approach this thesis discusses and critiques positivist paradigms and outlines key critical theories. Incorporated is a Kaupapa Maori theory approach which provides insights into Maori views of emancipation.

It is argued that 'Parents as First Teachers' is framed within positivist constructions of compensatory education which ignore wider cultural and structural considerations. Furthermore, this thesis argues that 'Parents as First Teachers' is not an emancipatory programme for Maori, rather it espouses 'victim-blaming' scenarios which maintain structural inequalities that perpetuate the subordinate positioning of Maori people.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 1984 the fourth Labour government came to power after 10 years in opposition. Their election promises had included a commitment to address issues pertaining to childcare. In their first term of government the labour party introduced a "flurry of early childhood initiatives" which included limited funding increases for childcare, the development of new initiatives for training and support services and the shifting of childcare from under the umbrella of the Department of Social Welfare to the Department of Education (May 1990).

However, major structural changes remained illusive, a situation that was tied directly to economic constraints. According to Helen May (1990)

"Inevitably, the problem has been the gap between the political rhetoric of support, for women and early childhood, and the reality of the government's delivering the cash resources to expand and fund the services. The woes of budget deficits and blowouts and the need for monetary constraint have provided a convenient rationale as a mask for patriarchal conservation."

(May, H., 1990:102-3)

The 1988 report, "Administering For Excellence" headed by Brian Picot, was the first educational report which included early childhood education as an integral part of the education system.

However there were "serious shortcomings" for early childhood education in the 'Picot' model and it was acknowledged by Peter Ramsay, a member of the Picot task force, as having been placed in the "too hard basket" (ibid.).

The establishment of an early childhood task force in 1988 could be construed as a 'follow-up' to the Picot report, however May contends that the task force was the result of intensive lobbying, on the part of the early childhood community and womens groups, for the government to follow through on election promises (ibid.).

Headed by Dr Anne Meade the task force focused specifically on early childhood care and education, its terms of reference being to "overview the funding, administration and delivery of all early childhood services" (ibid.). 'Education To Be More', commonly known as the 'Meade Report', although originating from election promises, was located within wider governmental economic strategies which emphasised the restructuring and deregulation of the education system as part of a 'free market' economic philosophy (ibid.).

The influence of free market philosophies within the early childhood sector may be seen in the limited governmental acceptance of the Meade report proposals. The Government's response to the Meade report came in the form of a document titled 'Before Five'. 'Before Five' espoused partial implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Meade

report, however the waiving of the recommendation for Boards of Trustees to be established for all centres re-emphasised market driven philosophies which on the whole benefited private centre owners.

Prior to the 1990 election Dr Lockwood Smith, the opposition spokesperson on education, promoted an early childhood policy which advanced the development of a home-based parent education programme. As part of National Party early childhood policies 'Parents as First Teachers' features significantly in the rhetoric surrounding childrens development from birth to three years. In 1990 'Parents as First Teachers' emerged in National Party education policy documents and was introduced in the mini-manifesto as being part of an "Investment in Achievement" by "breaking the cycle of failure". Speeches by Dr Smith targeted Maori people as potential recipients and beneficiaries of the programme. Few Maori people knew of the existence of the programme or its content.

The aim of this thesis is to critically analyse the relationship of the 'Parents as First Teachers' programme to the Maori community. This aim is based fundamentally on the question: Is 'Parents as First Teachers' an emancipatory model for Maori people?. In order to fully comprehend the processes that have been developed to address such a question it is necessary to outline the stages through which this thesis has moved to reach this particular point of expression.

My personal interest in 'Parents as First Teachers' can be located very firmly in my present life experiences as a Maori woman, mother of two preschool boys and an academic who is concerned with the education of our children. These are linked to a personal philosophy that seeks the complete validation and legitimation of Te Reo and Tikanga Maori, which has inherent within it a desire for a future that provides truly equitable living. While this philosophy is a personal one, it is sanctioned by a number of Maori whakatauki. The following whakatauki not only expresses this belief but provides the focus for action.

Hutia te rito o te harakeke

Kei hea te komako e ko?

Ki mai ki au

He aha te mea nui o te ao

Maku e ki atu

He Tangata, He Tangata, He Tangata

Pluck the centre shoot from the flax bush

Where will the Bellbird sing?

Ask me

What is the most important thing in the world

I will say

It is people, It is people, It is people

(Te Aupouri)

The belief in such a philosophy demands the active critique of and challenging of discourses within this society that contribute

to the imposition of hierarchical power relations by the dominant group.

Historically Pakeha schooling in Aotearoa was established as a means of social control (Simon 1990,1992) and a vehicle through which to 'civilise the natives' (Binney 1968). A quote from an un-named author which appeared in 'The New Zealander' (1846) outlines clearly the dominant attitudes of the early settlers to Maori involvement in schooling

"It were but rational, humane and politic to furnish the natives with sound instruction respecting both their duties, their moral obligations and their political privileges...Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of the times"

(The New Zealander, December 12 1846)

Early education policies were constructed in order to attain social "stability" and provide legislative frameworks through which to ensure the desired goal of assimilation was achieved. Throughout the past 153 years Maori people, Maori children have been defined as the "problem" within education policy making, solutions for which have on the whole been constructed and imposed upon Maori people by the dominant group through the mechanism of the State education system (Smith G., 1986). On examining 'Parents as First Teachers' it appeared to me to be yet another State constructed programme to be imposed on Maori people.

My initial intention was to interview a range of people who were (i) involved in the development of the programme at the implementation level and (ii) Maori people within the community,

in order to gain a sense of how the programme was viewed by both those involved in implementation and those who were perceived to be the recipients of the programme. I thought that by this approach I would be able to firstly examine the complex power relations that are involved in the processes of policy development and implementation. Secondly, it would provide a means through which to explore the perceptions of Maori people of PAFT as a dominant group constructed policy. At the time my thesis was that there existed contradictory perceptions of the programme and its usefulness for Maori. Further to which, Maori people would express strategies of rejection and resistance, highlighting PAFT as a site of contestation.

A preliminary interview was held with Dr Smith in May 1992, which provided insights into how the policy had been conceived. After considering the interview some key points became apparent.

- (i) that the impetus for the policy originated from Dr Smith himself and was therefore state led rather than community led
- (ii) the programme was a direct transplanting of the 'Missouri project'
- (iii) the programme was assumed to be 'universal' and therefore would meet the needs of all people
- (iv) Dr Smith believed the programme would address the issue of underachievement by breaking the "cycle of underachievement, cycle of failure" and serve as a 'cure' for glue ear and illiteracy
- (v) the programme was based within dominant group cultural

assumptions and both Te Reo and Tikanga Maori were marginalised within the construction of the programme.

Readings and discussions with my supervisor, staff and students of the education department, about the programme highlighted the need for a review of the ontological assumptions within the policy. Long hours of working through the issues raised brought about a major shift in the methodology employed for the thesis. There had, through these processes emerged a clear need for a critical analysis to be undertaken to ascertain the theoretical base of the programme, and to examine and reveal the power relations that are inscribed within such theoretical constructions.

The writings of John Codd (1988), Roger Dale (1986), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1986, 1990, 1992) and Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1986, 1988, 1990) have contributed significantly to this shift. Codd in his article 'The Construction and Deconstruction of Educational Policy documents' notes

"Policy documents...do not have a single authoritative meaning. They are not blueprints for political action expressing a set of unequivocal intentions."
(ibid.:244)

Such a statement challenges perceptions of policy documents as conveying fixed singular meaning as is expressed in a 'technical-empiricist' approach to education policy making. A technical-empiricist perspective views policy documents as "expressions of political purpose, that is as statements of the courses of action" (ibid.). Analysis of policy documents, within such a

paradigm, is then relegated to a process of establishing an authoritative interpretation, i.e. there exists one, correct interpretation of the text and the intent of the policy.

The 'technical-empiricist' model asserts an instrumentalist view in which the policy document is merely a vehicle through which intentions are communicated. This approach may be equated to what Roger Dale (1986) identifies as the 'Policy Analysis' and 'Social Administration' projects, both of which assume there exists a singular intent, purpose and interpretation of policy documents which require efficient and effective delivery.

Codd's article reveals how policy documents hold multiple intentions and readings which when exposed highlight the contesting, and at times contradictory nature of the document, for example in relation to the Curriculum Review document he states

"The document asserts that a national common curriculum should 'be given status by regulation' and that each school have responsibility to develop a school curriculum which is consistent with the national common curriculum. In other words, the document presents simultaneously proposals which can be interpreted as representing both centralisation and decentralisation of common...Nowhere in the document is the possibility of conflicts of interest discussed."
(Codd, J., 1988:245)

Also challenging authoritative, singular interpretation are the writings of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1986, 1990, 1992) and Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1986, 1990a, 1990b). Both writers have actively critiqued the ways in which education policies have been defined and constructed within dominant Pakeha epistemological

frameworks, which have on the whole served to maintain and perpetuate existing structural inequalities and have failed to address Maori underachievement within the education system.

In acknowledging the multiple intentions and the power relations which exist in relation to education policy making there inevitably exists multiple readings of such documents. This thesis presents one reading and as such remains partial. According to Alison Jones (1992), declaring partiality has its dangers,

"The "openness" may well be turned against self-conscious feminist and other critical research, weakening its impact in the very places where its insights must be used in the interests of women and other marginalised groups. Policy makers and other powerful people in the conservative political climate may use the self-critique of feminist authors to undermine their work's validity within a society still dominated by the hegemony of the 'truth'."

(Jones, A., 1992:29)

In recognising the partiality of this account I also recognise that it has been constructed as a challenge to dominant discourses surrounding issues of Maori parenting in Aotearoa, and calls for critical educators to add their voices to the critique of policies such as Parents as First Teachers.

Critical analysis of issues such as (i) state intervention in parenting, and (ii) the funding cuts and reallocations within the early childhood education sector are areas that are not discussed within this writing and which I believe warrant analysis. Issues of the role of the state and an analysis of monetary constraints within the early childhood sector have been discussed elsewhere

(see Gordon 1990). These areas are crucial to the positioning of early childhood education in society. However, to remain within the scope of this thesis, the focus of this writing remains one of critical analysis of theoretical paradigms that have influenced the development of Parents as First Teachers in America and its subsequent importing to this country.

Engaging in a process of revealing theoretical underpinnings and the assumptions within theoretical positionings is a means through which to highlight that 'common-sense' beliefs of practice are not located separately from theory. Paulo Freire (1985) terms this relationship 'Dialectical unity' within which theory and practice are inexplicably bound. Many Maori people experience marginalisation and failure as a result of the imposition of the practices of dominant group education policy makers and implementers. It is essential, therefore that we engage with dominant theoretical discourses that are part of the construction of policy documents.

It is appropriate then that this thesis commences with an overview of a number of theoretical frameworks that may be located under the umbrella of 'Positivism'. Positivist theory, within Aotearoa, has on the whole provided support and justification for the maintenance of Pakeha dominance and the subsequent subordination of Maori people, the Tangata Whenua of this land. Biological determinism and dominant group constructions of racial hierarchies through paradigms such as Social Darwinism became vehicles through which to equip the

coloniser with 'scientific evidence' of the 'inferiority' of Maori people.

Environmental theories provided a major shift away from genetic determinism to an emphasis on aspects of cultural 'disadvantage', 'deprivation' and 'difference', all of which were considered measurable through 'scientific' methods such as counting the number of books in the home and comparing family size, to name but two. Cultural deprivation theories were, like their biological predecessors, constructed by the dominant group and from a premise that Pakeha culture was the 'yard-stick' against which Maori people would be measured. Maori children were tested, assessed, evaluated, streamed on the basis of their achievements within Pakeha cultural frameworks. Te Reo and Tikanga Maori were viewed as being fundamentally opposed to what is counted as educational 'success'. This educational view was legitimated, and actively promoted, through the early policies of assimilation (Simon 1990, 1992). The later 'softening' of official attitudes to Te Reo and Tikanga Maori came well after the effects of the suppression of Te Reo and Tikanga Maori were being felt and tended to be in response to issues of self-worth and self-esteem rather than a concern for educational 'success'.

Responses to the deterministic nature of Positivist theories within education has come from a range of theorists that may be positioned beneath a theoretical umbrella of 'Critical theory'. Critical theory encompasses a diversity of theorists and theoretical positions, however there remains a universal belief

in the need to actively critique Positivist frameworks and expose the ways in which these serve to perpetuate existing power relations that benefit particular interest groups in society.

A central concept drawn upon by critical theorists is that of emancipation through which oppressed groups are, themselves, able to identify and act against unequal power relations (Gibson 1986, Coxon 1992). The critical theoretical frameworks employed within this identification, to be discussed within this thesis, are: Reproduction theories, Resistance theory and Kaupapa Maori theory.

Kaupapa Maori theorising is indigenous to Aotearoa and derives from both traditional and contemporary Maori knowledge forms, which assert the validity and legitimacy of Te Reo and Tikanga Maori. As such Kaupapa Maori theory challenges dominant ideologies which serve to both marginalise and invisibilise Te Reo and Tikanga Maori, and seeks to transform an oppressive reality through actively contesting the unequal power relations between Pakeha and Maori. There is therefore a clear relationship between Kaupapa Maori theory and critical theory. However Kaupapa Maori is not a 'new' theory as it has its roots in a traditional framework of knowledge, rather, Kaupapa Maori is a reassertion of Maori epistemological constructions of the world.

Essential to Kaupapa Maori theorising is an act of deconstructing dominant constructions that have been imposed upon Maori people through processes of both overt and hegemonic violence. This allows Maori people to move outside of dominant constructions to reconstruct Maori institutions within our own definitions and frameworks. The historical progression of Maori early childhood education within Aotearoa is a prime example of such a process.

Early childhood education for Maori children may be said to have come a full circle. Traditionally the care and education of Maori babies and young children took place within the whanau. The undermining of Maori societal structures within a post-colonial era has seen the fragmentation of many Maori whanau structures and as such the breakdown of traditional early education structures. The, supposed, replacement came in the form of a range of Pakeha constructed early childhood institutions which have on the whole failed to meet the needs of Maori children and their families. The subsequent emergence of Te Kohanga Reo in the early eighties has seen a reconstruction of Maori whanau-based education which according to Rangimarie Rose Pere (1986) "is one of the closest situations we have to the traditional Maori ecological base".

Te Kohanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Maori movements as proactive initiatives defined, constructed and controlled by Maori people have flourished through the commitment of Maori parents to providing an education for their children within a Kaupapa Maori environment. These assertions have again been marginalised by

policy makers in their unilateral development of Parents as First Teachers.

The proposed Parents as First Teachers programme is based upon an American programme, 'The Missouri Project', which I will argue carries much of the theoretical assumptions that were utilised in the sixties 'Head Start' programmes in the States. Both programmes may be defined as compensatory programmes and therefore located within environmental or cultural deprivation theories. As a forerunner, to both the Missouri Project and Parents as First Teachers, Head Start was heavily critiqued by radical educators and deemed inappropriate to meet the needs of 'minority' children. The Missouri Project may be viewed in a similar vein, as like Head Start, it is constructed within dominant group definitions of what constitutes parenting and what is considered appropriate cultural capital.

Deriving from such models Parents as First Teachers is highly problematic. Questions as to the appropriateness of implementing a compensatory programme here in the 1990s, after what can be construed as the failure of such programmes in the seventies, must be raised. Furthermore questions of who defines what is appropriate parenting?, how has parenting and early childhood education been defined and constructed? and by whom?, whose interests are served by such constructions?, how are Maori people located within the programme?, what are the power relations that exist within the programme?, are Te Reo and Tikanga Maori validated and legitimated within the policy? must be considered.

I will attempt to engage with and address these questions throughout this thesis in arguing that 'Parents as First Teachers' is not an emancipatory model for Maori people. Furthermore, I will argue that the programme remains yet another dominant group imposition which serves to validate dominant Pakeha cultural constructions thereby maintaining the status quo and perpetuating existing structural inequalities.