

Indigenous Struggle for the Transformation of Education and Schooling

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Introduction: Maori Case Study

The New Zealand case study examines the period of the 1980's in New Zealand that has produced a range of societal changes for Maori, some which are still impacting in 2003. More importantly perhaps, the Maori example is a practical one in that it is not simply a set of ideas removed from practice. In considering the Maori example, there is a need to be clear what the real revolution was that occurred in New Zealand in the 1980's. The revolution was not so much about the stunning language revitalization initiatives, (which is the popularly espoused interpretation of the revolution); in this view these were merely the outward visible signs of a much more profound revolution. The 'real' revolution of the 1980's was a shift in mindset of large numbers of Maori people - a shift away from waiting for things to be done to them, to doing things for themselves; a shift away from an emphasis on reactive politics to and an emphasis on being more proactive; a shift from negative motivation to positive motivation. These shifts can be

described as a move away from talking simplistically about 'de-colonization' (which puts the colonizer at the center of attention) to talking about 'conscientization' or 'consciousness-raising' (which puts Maori at the center). These ways of thinking illustrate a reawakening of the Maori imagination that had been stifled and diminished by colonization processes.

In accepting increased responsibility for transforming their own condition and subsequently 'getting out from under the influence of the reproductive forces of dominant society' Maori found a way to get momentum towards change. This was a critical moment in Maori history. In particular it involved dealing with what I have termed the 'politics of distraction'. This is the colonizing process of being kept busy by the colonizer, of always being on the 'back-foot', 'responding', 'engaging', 'accounting', 'following' and 'explaining'. These are typical strategies often used over indigenous people. The 'logic' (notwithstanding that many of these practices are not even thought about - they are better described as bad habits) seems to be that if the 'natives' are kept busy doing 'trivial pursuits' there will little time left to complain, question or rebel against the 'status quo' conditions. There are also various 'distractions' (that must also be confronted) that are perpetrated by 'Maori' against 'ourselves'. This 'self-abuse' is aptly described in what Antonio Gramsci (1971) labeled as 'hegemony'. Hegemony is a way of thinking - it occurs when oppressed groups take on dominant group thinking and ideas uncritically and as 'common-sense', even though those ideas may in fact be contributing to forming their own oppression. It is the ultimate way to colonize a people; you have the colonized colonizing themselves! The counter strategy to hegemony is that indigenous people need to critically 'conscientize' themselves about

their needs, aspirations and preferences. This calls for a 'freeing-up' of the indigenous imagination and thinking given that one of the important elements of colonization is the diminishment of the indigenous ability to actually imagine freedom or a utopian vision free of the oppressor. Thus a critical element in the 'revolution' has to be the struggle for our minds - the freeing of the indigenous mind from the grip of dominant hegemony.

A further issue here is that many indigenous groups have followed practices and programs of what has been termed 'decolonization'. In many ways this is a different way to achieving similar outcomes to the processes of 'conscientization' and 'consciousness-raising'. However, I would argue that both of the processes are very different and teach and emphasize some distinctly different elements. My preference for using the latter terms is in fact based on the proactive and positive stance of a Kaupapa Maori approach. The term 'decolonization' is a reactive notion; it immediately puts the colonizer and the history of colonization back at the 'centre'. In moving to transformative politics we need to understand the history of colonization but the bulk of our work and focus must be on what it is that we want, what is that we are about and to 'imagine' our future.

In summary, the lesson of the Kaupapa Maori approach from New Zealand is that transformation has to be won on at least two broad fronts; a confrontation with the colonizer and a confrontation with 'ourselves'. This is what I have labeled as the 'inside - out' model of transformation - in this sense, as Paulo Freire (1971) has reminded us, 'first free ourselves before we can free others'.

The Need to Centralize the Issue of Transformation

Based on our experience in New Zealand, I would identify six critical sites of struggle in assisting indigenous communities and peoples to transform themselves.

1. A need to understand and respond to the unhelpful divide between indigenous communities and the Academy. This impacts in indigenous communities in feelings of distrust; lack of access, participation and success at higher levels of education; an undermining of the capacity to educate beyond the self-fulfilling cycle of educational underachievement and socio-economic marginalization)
2. A need to understand and respond to the new formations of colonization (the false consciousness of 'watching the wrong door' i.e. the traditional forms of colonization; the need to develop critical consciousness of new economic formations and to get beyond hegemony that holds them in place).
3. A need to understand and respond to the 'politics of distraction'; to move beyond being kept busy and engaged with liberal strategies. This keeps indigenous people from engaging with the deeper structural issues. Need to move to become proactive around our own aspirations; to take over autonomous control.
4. A need to understand and respond to the construction of an ultimate vision of what it is that is being struggled for; there is a need to develop the 'end game'; to develop direction, purpose and impetus in struggle and to recognize the incremental gains along the way to the realization of the 'vision'.
5. A need to understand and respond to the struggle for the Academy; to reclaim the validity and legitimacy

of our own language, knowledge and culture; to position our own ways of knowing as being relevant and significant in the 'elite' knowledge production and reproduction 'factories'.

6. A need to understand and engage with the State to encourage the State apparatus to work for indigenous interests as well.

A Call to Theory

One of key initiatives that Maori have taken is a strategic reinvestment in theoretical tools to assist their transformation. This is not an uncritical exercise. It has involved understanding the politics surrounding theory, the understanding of the flaws of theory and academic work of the past and most of all, the proactive development of indigenous theorizing by ourselves. This latter initiative has been focused, but not exclusively, in the area of Kaupapa Maori Theory (c.f. Smith, 1997).

Thus, from the indigenous point of view, the following elements of what might count as 'useful' theory and theorizing, are deemed critical;

1. It needs to be seen as a potentially useful tool for assisting positive transformation of our conditions.
2. It needs to be seen as a 'tool' - useful in the right hands and potentially destructive in the wrong hands. Thus the onus is on the person selecting to use the theory (or not to use it), i.e. to assess its relevance and usefulness.
3. It needs to be transformative because the 'status quo' for most indigenous contexts is not working well and needs to be improved.
4. It needs to move beyond homogenizing position of seeing 'struggle' as a single issue and therefore needs

to be adaptable to develop multiple transforming strategies (some of which might be applied simultaneously).

5. It needs to be accountable to the community; the ideas around praxis and 'action research methodology' are useful here.

Any transformative theory intended to benefit indigenous communities must have as implicit components;

- i. A capacity to make 'space' for itself to be sustained in a context of unequal power relationships with the colonizer and the critique that will inevitably be developed as such indigenous theorizing often contradicts and challenges the existing and accepted ways of knowing, doing and understanding in the Academy.
- ii. A capacity to sustain the validity and legitimacy of the theory in the face of challenge both from the colonizing imperatives and from internal (indigenous) hegemonic forces
- iii. A capacity to be 'owned' and to 'make sense' to the indigenous communities themselves
- iv. A capacity that has the potential to positively make a difference - to move indigenous people to a better existence
- v. A capacity to be continuously reviewed and revised by those for whom the theory is intended to serve.

In summary this creating indigenous space in the Academy for indigenous development and advancement is about;

Capacity building by employing more indigenous academic staff and where necessary growing them;

Capability building by uplifting the skill and leadership level of indigenous academic staff

Developing indigenous staff into leadership positions across the academy;

Growing a critical mass of indigenous intellectuals who have a consciousness about their indigenous roots and responsibilities;

Developing curriculum options that are built around indigenous interests first and foremost;

Growing both horizontal (participation across the institution and disciplines) **and vertical** (indigenous programming for indigenous students first and foremost) equity development within institutions;

Re-claiming equity definitions from the neo-liberal economic hegemony that tends to argue against compensatory forms of equity in favor of the 'level playing field' form of equity that simply entrenches the 'status quo';

Putting **equal emphasis and accountability** on 'access', 'participation', 'retention, and 'success' of indigenous students.

Critical observations from the NZ context

Despite a history of educational policy failure in New Zealand, the 1980s saw a radical change occur in respect

of Maori education and schooling. This change did not come out of the education and schooling system that was essentially designed to reproduce and perpetuate the status quo of Pakeha (White New Zealander) dominance. The educational and schooling revolution that occurred in New Zealand in the 1980's developed out of Maori communities who were so concerned with the loss of Maori language, knowledge and culture that they took matters into their own hands and set up their own learning institutions at pre-school, elementary school, secondary school and tertiary levels. The initial pre-school movement was developed following a research program initiated by the NZCER and the senior researcher Dr. Richard Benton who in 1971 reported the alarming news that Maori language was in the last throes of language 'death'. It was this finding that finally moved Maori to such an extent that radical action was initiated. Maori communities across the country were united in the need to defend their language and culture. To cut a long story short, the Maori language nests (Te Kohanga Reo) set in motion a string of schooling and education interventions undertaken by Maori people themselves. These initiatives were initiated as 'alternative' ideas, developed as resistance initiatives outside of the 'mainstream' system. This is one of the very reasons for their success - they were able to unhinge themselves from the 'gate-keeping' reproductive elements of the dominant controlled system. In quick order Kura Kaupapa Maori Elementary Schools, (Maori immersion philosophy and practice schools), Kura Tuarua (Maori immersion secondary school options) and Whare Wananga (Maori Tertiary options) were established. Another key understanding is that all of these responses were developed by individuals and communities who were prepared to take action for themselves and were willing to go outside of the constraints of the system to

achieve it. A common catch-cry was that was used as a justification was that *'we can't do any worse than the system is currently doing - there is only one way to go - upwards'*. The lessons learned from the Maori example do have relevance and meaning in other indigenous contexts. However, one must be careful in adopting these strategies uncritically or without proper consideration of the specific cultural context in which they are being re-applied. Some bits will be useful other elements may not be so relevant. It is also important to understand also that the Maori political context is circumscribed by a single Treaty agreement signed in 1840 between Maori tribes and Crown and also that Maori have a single language spoken across all tribes with some minor tribal variances. Both of these elements enabled tribes more easily to develop a unity that cut across individual tribal situations and develop and 'national front' on these issues.

Kaupapa Maori Theory

In this next section I examine the set of transformative elements that are common to all of these Maori alternative education and schooling initiatives. That is, the key intervention elements that are consistently found within these Maori resistance initiatives from pre-school (Te Kohanga Reo) to Tertiary institutions (Waananga), are identified as a core set of 'change' factors. In identifying these common intervention elements Maori are able to make informed generalizations about developing successful transformative actions that have the potential to be more widely applied across other societal contexts and across to other indigenous situations. One of the critical elements that ought to be understood here relates to the renewed commitment of Maori adults and parents to the potential of Education to

make a positive difference. This change of attitude to schooling and education is a major turn around for many Maori parents to reinvest in education and schooling despite their own stories of hurt and humiliation from their own schooling encounters. That is, many of these same parents harboured misgivings, fears and resistance to '*dominant: Pakeha: state*' schooling as a result of their own negative experiences.

The following six principles are considered to be the crucial change factors in Kaupapa Maori praxis. They are variously referred to in the literature as 'Kaupapa Maori' (Maori philosophy, world-view and cultural principles), Kaupapa Maori praxis, Kaupapa Maori Theory. The key elements are summarised here;

1. The principle of Self-determination or Relative Autonomy

The issue here is the need by Maori to have increased 'control over one's own life and cultural well-being'. This factor has made gains within the kaupapa of Maori schools given that these schools have been organised by Maori teachers and decision-makers. Greater autonomy over key decision-making in schooling has been attained for example in regard to administration, curriculum, pedagogy and Maori cultural aspirations. A major point is that because Maori people are in charge of the key decision-making, they are able to make choices and decisions that reflect their cultural, political, economic and social preferences. Furthermore, when Maori make decisions for themselves, the 'buy in' and commitment by Maori participants to making the ideas work is more certain and assured.

2. The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity

In Kura Kaupapa Maori, '*to be Maori*' is taken for granted; there is little need to justify one's identity, as is the case in most other 'mainstream' educational settings. In Kaupapa Maori educational settings, Maori language, knowledge, culture and values are validated and legitimated by themselves - this is a 'given', a 'taken for granted' base in these schools. Maori cultural aspirations are more assured in these settings, particularly in light of the wider societal context of the struggle for Maori language and cultural survival. One of the common faults of previous schooling interventions has been the inadequate attention paid to this aspect of supporting the maintenance of Maori culture and identity. In incorporating these elements, a strong emotional and spiritual factor is introduced to Kaupapa Maori settings, which 'locks in' the commitment of Maori to the intervention. In particular many Maori adults have been convinced that schooling might *now* have some relevance and consequently, many Maori parents who were once 'put off' schooling by their own negative experiences, have now become re-committed by the emotional and cultural pull of the Kaupapa Maori approach.

3. The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy

That teaching and learning settings and practices are able to closely and effectively 'connect' with the cultural backgrounds and life circumstances (socio-economic) of Maori communities. These teaching and learning choices are 'selected' as being 'culturally preferred'. Other pedagogy is also utilised including universal schooling

methods, and some cross-cultural borrowing, e.g. Japanese pedagogy. - 'Soroban' maths programme; learning of Japanese language. The move towards Pacific/Asian cultures and language is a logical development given the close cultural similarities in some aspects, and the shared commonalities of the Austronesian group of languages.

4. The principle of mediating socio-economic and home difficulties

The 'Kaupapa' (philosophy) of Kura Kaupapa Maori is such a powerful and all embracing force, through its emotional (ngakau) and spiritual (wairua) elements, that it commits Maori communities to take seriously the potential of schooling as a positive experience despite other social and economic impediments abroad in the wider community. It not only impacts at the ideological level, and is able to assist in mediating a societal context of unequal power relations; it also makes schooling a priority consideration despite debilitating social and economic circumstances. Within the collective cultural structures and practices of whanau (extended family) some alleviation of the impact of debilitating socio-economic circumstances can be obtained. Put another way, by drawing on the social capital of the culturally collective practice, a mediation of what might otherwise be debilitating socio-economic circumstances are able to be achieved.

5. The principle of incorporating cultural structures which emphasise the 'collective' rather than the 'individual' such as the notion of the extended family

The extended family structure supports the ideological support 'won' in the previous category. It does this by

providing a collective and shared support structure to alleviate and mediate social and economic difficulties, parenting difficulties, health difficulties and others. Such difficulties are not located in individual homes but in the total whanau (extended family structures and networks); the whanau takes collective responsibility to assist and intervene. While the whanau structure implies a support network for individual members there is also a reciprocal obligation on individual members to 'invest' in the whanau group. In this way, parents are culturally 'contracted' to support and assist in the education of all of the children in the whanau. Perhaps the most significant aspect of whanau administration and management is that it brings back into the schooling setting many parents who were once extremely 'hostile' to education given their own 'unhappy' schooling experiences. This is a major feature of Kura Kaupapa Maori schooling intervention - it has committed parents to re-invest in schooling and education for their children.

6. The principle of a shared and collective vision / philosophy

The Kura Kaupapa Maori (primary schools) has a collective vision, which is written into a formal charter entitled 'Te Aho Matua'. This vision provides the guidelines for excellence in Maori, that is, what a good Maori education should entail. It also acknowledges Pakeha culture and skills required by Maori children to participate fully and at every level in modern New Zealand society. 'Te Aho Matua' builds on the Kaupapa of Te Kohanga Reo, and provides the parameters for the uniqueness that is Kura Kaupapa Maori. Its power is in its ability to articulate and connect with Maori aspirations, politically, socially, economically and

culturally. A powerful vision is able to provide impetus and direction to struggle.

This list is not a definitive one in that it only suggests some (six) of the key elements, which contribute to the success of these alternative schooling and educational initiatives in New Zealand. In summary Kaupapa Maori Theory (see Smith, 1997) fulfils the following functions within indigenous Maori struggle for schooling and education.

- i. It promotes the validity and legitimacy of Maori language, knowledge and culture.
- ii. It creates the political space to enable the legitimate study and continuance of Maori language, knowledge and culture (it is not a study of Maturanga Maori - Kaupapa Maori theory makes space for Maori to legitimately conduct their own studies of Maturanga Maori in their own terms and own ways. In this sense Kaupapa Maori is not a synonym for Maturanga Maori which some people (who have obviously not read the existing literature or attended the Hui where this issue has been discussed) have mistakenly asserted.
- iii. It is positioned as Maori centered, but also speaks cross-culturally in the sense of making space for Maori language, knowledge and culture existence.
- iv. It is concerned with economics and structural change.
- v. It attempts to takes account of unequal 'power relations' and dominant / subordinate politics.
- vi. It is transformative in its aims.
- vii. It attempts to challenge existing theory as being culturally and interest laden.
- viii. It supports the use of all existing theory (by Maori) providing that it can positively support Maori advancement.

ix. It recognizes that indigenous struggle is neither singular nor homogenous; and that there is a need to 'struggle' on several levels and in several sites, often simultaneously.

Transformative Praxis

Underpinning the Maori intervention elements described above are important understandings about transformative praxis and by extension, critical pedagogy. The intervention strategies applied by Maori in New Zealand are complex and respond simultaneously to multiple formations of oppression and exploitation. This expansive resistance approach is important in responding to the new formations and re-shaping of cultural oppression(s) and economic exploitation(s). That is, multiply formed oppressions need to be responded to multiply formed resistance strategies. In this sense the shape of the 'struggle' with which Maori are engaged, is neither singular, nor lineal, nor instrumental.

The Kaupapa Maori educational interventions represent the evolving of a more sophisticated response by Maori to 'freeing' themselves from multiple oppression(s) and exploitation. In particular, the very emergence of Kaupapa Maori as an intervention strategy, critiques and re-constitutes the 'Western dominant' resistance notions of *conscientization*, *resistance* and *transformative praxis* in different configurations. In particular, Maori re-configuration rejects the notion that each of these concepts 'stand' individually; or that they are necessarily to be interpreted as being a lineal progression from *conscientization*, to *resistance*, to *praxis*. That is, one state is not necessarily a prerequisite or contingent on the other states. Thus the following popular representation of transformative action (based on a

predominantly Western type of thinking) needs to be critically engaged;

Figure 1. (not available on digital copy)

Conscientization Resistance Transformative action

The position implicit within the new formations of Maori intervention, and which may have wider significance for other indigenous populations is that all of the above components are important; all need to be held simultaneously; all stand in equal relation to each other. This representation might best be understood as a cycle. For example;

Figure 2. . (not available on digital copy)

A further point here is that individuals and groups enter the cycle from any position and do not necessarily (in reflecting on Maori experience within Kaupapa Maori interventions) have to start at the point of 'conscientization'. In other words, individuals have been caught up in transformative praxis unintentionally. For example, the case of a parent taking their children to Kohanga Reo (because it was the only early childhood option in the town), and this later led to the parents becoming 'conscientized' about the politics of language revitalisation and highly active participants in resistance movement. This is a significant critique of much of the writing on these concepts that tend to portray a lineal progression through the stages of '*conscientization, resistance and transformative action*'. Maori experience tends to suggest that these elements may occur in any order and indeed may all occur simultaneously. It is

important to note as well that the arrows in the diagram go in both directions, which reinforces the idea of simultaneous engagement with more than one element. It is also an inclusive representation of struggle and moves beyond the hierarchical representation implied in the lineal model. In the cycle diagram, all Maori can be plotted somewhere on the circle (some are standing still, some are going backwards, others are well advanced) - the point is that every Maori is in the struggle whether they like it or not, whether they know it or not.

One of the most exciting developments with respect to the organic resistance initiatives of Maori in the 1980s and 1990s has been the discernible shift and maturing in the way resistance activities are being understood and practised. Now, a greater emphasis is placed on attempting to take account of structuralist concerns (economic, ideological, and power structures) as well as culturalist responses (related to agency). Some of the important factors which the Maori resistance initiatives attempt to engage with relate to economic, ideological and power dimensions, that are derived from a nexus of *'state: dominant: Pakeha cultural interests.'*

Where indigenous people are in educational crises, indigenous educators and teachers must be trained to be 'change agents', to develop transformation of the undesirable circumstances. They must develop a 'radical pedagogy' (a teaching approach for change). Such pedagogy must also be informed by their own cultural preferences and respond to their own critical circumstance. This paper is concerned to impart this message based on Maori experience in Aotearoa. I believe there is much to inform other indigenous contexts from this situation, in particular, the need to focus on the process of 'transforming', and on the

transformative outcomes - What is it? How can it be achieved? Do indigenous people's needs and aspirations require different schooling approaches? Who benefits? Such critical questions, which relate to the task of teachers being change agents, must not only inform our teacher education approaches, they must also ensure the 'buy in' from the communities they are purporting to serve.

Kia mau ki te Kaupapa ! (Hold fast to the Vision)

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