

Addressing Māori Education through Alternative Schools in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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In response to a moribund language, declining academic achievement, and previous unlawfulness regarding the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori communities throughout New Zealand founded a school system independent of the mainstream system. These schools, based on the philosophy of Kaupapa Māori, have attempted to deal with these three issues facing the Māori communities. While the educational achievement of Māori youth has improved since the school system's establishment, the statistics and the data regarding language rejuvenation and tertiary school enrollment demonstrate that this improvement may be misleading. Furthermore, the growing prominence of Māori-centric programs in the mainstream schools further confounds the issue. In spite of these challenges, these schools provide four lessons applicable to other countries attempting to improve the educational achievement of their indigenous populations.

Introduction

By A.D. 1000, a group of Polynesians, later known as the Māori, had migrated to both the islands of New Zealand (Diamond, 1997). Eight-hundred years later, the British united both islands under one government. The educational policies introduced by the colonizers not only favored the European and White New Zealanders, but the style of teaching proved detrimental to the Māori youth, causing many children to drop school prematurely. However, over the past twenty-five years, the Māori communities of New Zealand have striven to improve the education of their children by teaching in an environment that fosters better learning. The creation of an entire school system, parallel to the government's mainstream public system and based on Māori culture, language, and philosophy, has given new hope to these indigenous communities of New Zealand.

This paper will examine the role these schools have played in attempting to remedy the concerns in Māori educational achievement. I will first discuss the concerns surrounding indigenous education, as well as introduce the particular case of New Zealand. Then, I will describe the Māori-based school system by examining the factors leading to, the underlying philosophy of, and the methods used in this system. I will then analyze the program's efficacy with regard to achievement. I will end with recommendations to New Zealanders and to citizens from other countries hoping to improve upon the difficulties inherent in indigenous education.

The Issue of Indigenous Education

Education promotes personal empowerment through the broadening of a knowledge base, through improved employment possibilities and enhanced participation in society. Unfortunately, faced with a colonizing force, indigenous groups may not always have the opportunity to be educated. Such asymmetry creates a division between both groups, particularly in the realm of socioeconomic and political power. As time progresses, this disparity often widens, further depressing

the indigenous peoples while raising the colonists to a greater level of authority. Education policies instituted by the colonial powers typically serve the purpose of "assimilating and integrating the indigenous peoples into a 'national' society and identity" (May & Aikman, 2003, p. 143). Such policies often result in a diminishment of the traditional cultures and languages (Penetito, 2002). In addition, the indigenous populations are often trained not to strive in the professional world, but to seek domestic and physical labor-intensive work. Such programs can, over time, result in the endangerment or extinction of an indigenous society.

Throughout the world, indigenous groups understand the importance of education in their very survival, especially in societies where they are a minority. In addition, education enhances ethnic pride through the belief that "education has now come to be seen as a key arena in which indigenous peoples can reclaim and revalue their languages and cultures" (May & Aikman, 2003, p. 141). As such, education encourages indigenous youth to embrace their heritages, and set themselves apart from the majority population. Both of these may improve their ability to participate in the general workforces of the mainstream societies. Indigenous education creates distinctions between groups in an attempt to promote socioeconomic equality.

Before continuing with this discussion, it is essential that the meaning of 'indigenous' be fully understood. The International Labor Organisation's (ILO) Convention 169, adopted in June of 1989, sets out a definition of indigenous persons:

1.1.b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (International Labor Organization, 1989, p. 1).

Retaining and relying on institutions considered separate from those found in mainstream society helps to legitimize the knowledge base found within the indigenous communities. Applying this indigenous knowledge to socioeconomic mediation and to education allows “people who were previously characterised as ignorant or backward...some agency in determining their own development” (Sundar, 2002, p. 374). It provides them with some personal power, manifested through movements of self-determination.

New Zealand, through the Māori-controlled school system described below, presents a case in which an indigenous group has gained power and has cemented its identity through self-determination. Unfortunately, elsewhere in the world, indigenous groups have had less luck in improving the educational opportunities for their youth. While the New Zealand case is far from perfect, it provides four lessons that other countries should consider when designing educational programs for their indigenous populations. First, these programs must incorporate indigenous knowledge, as well as be culturally sensitive. Second, the teachers should come from within the indigenous groups. Third, national governments need to involve the indigenous communities in the design of these education programs. Finally, these communities must have control over their programs, and remain largely free of politicization. These four lessons, discussed in greater detail below, demonstrate that New Zealand has made inroads into dealing with the concerns surrounding indigenous education. While the improvements resulting from the alternative schools have not been great, the Māori and the New Zealand government have made progress in the right direction. Other governments should learn from this case, where addressing the proximate issue of education, the ultimate issue of indigenous identity loss is also addressed.

The Educational Concerns of the Māori

Loss of indigenous identity almost occurred in New Zealand. Following the assimilationist education policies of the previous 130 years, the late 1970s saw three trends that troubled the indigenous Māori and many Pākehā (New Zealanders with European ancestry) government officials alike. First, the Māori language, *te reo Māori*, was near extinction.¹ Due to previous educational policies, the majority of the elderly could not speak the language. The British had previously taught the Māori solely in English, away from their communities, and only to a level suitable for laborers and domestic workers. By the 1930s, the British Crown had almost completely disregarded the importance of the native culture and language. Therefore, many of the Māori men and women who had survived this loss of culture could not pass on their heritage, and in particular, their language to their children (Titus, 2001). By the 1970s, typical public schools still did not teach *te reo Māori*, thus depriving the Māori children of an opportunity to formally learn the traditional language. Many Māori and Pākehā began to believe that if no

measures were taken to curb this trend, the language would disappear within the next generation of the Māori communities (Benton, 1979).

The second troubling trend involved the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, which produced a governance structure between both groups. The British saw New Zealand as another colony, which could extend their reach into the South Pacific. The native Māori believed that the Treaty would give them better control over their traditional land of Aotearoa. Therefore, in a *hui*, or large gathering, 540 Māori elders and numerous British representatives signed the Treaty, creating an equal partnership that quickly changed into a dominant-subordinate relationship (Doerr, 2004) that persisted well into the 20th century. Essentially, the Pākehā had not upheld the Treaty of Waitangi, which originally set out “obligations of the Crown to Maori to protect their language and culture, and all that entails, and to protect their right to self government” (Brell, 2000, p. 245). The failure of the New Zealand government to support the Treaty disheartened many Māori, who felt they had lost their rights. In addition, many members of the government came to believe that their policies had been unfair and possibly illegal.

Third, and most pressing, the Māori youth were not achieving at a level comparable to their fellow students in the primary and secondary schools. Eighty-five percent of Māori youth in schools during the 1970s left before even completing their secondary educations (Titus, 2001). This failure threatened the future livelihoods and the economic security of the Māori communities.

These three overarching reasons forced both the government and the Māori communities to change the education system in an effort to decrease the growing gap between the Māori and the Pākehā. However, such a goal is not easily achieved. After numerous policy changes, budgetary allocations, and projects implemented by the Māori, the gap is far from bridged. An examination of school leavers² qualifications, from none to the University Bursary,³ demonstrates the key difference between the educational achievements of the Māori and the non-Māori (mainly Pākehā).⁴ In 2002, 38.3% of Māori boys, compared to 17.1% of non-Māori boys, left school with no qualification. The percentages of Māori students leaving with higher qualifications decreased compared to the increasing percentage of non-Māori achievement. Only 3.1% of Māori boys attained a University Bursary, compared to 19.5% of non-Māori boys (Ministry of Education, 2004). Girls performed slightly better than the boys in both categories.

The Māori communities believed that teaching styles and classroom environments contributed to this discrepancy in educational achievement. Infusing the schools and classrooms with Māori culture would improve the prospects for the Māori youth. One way to accomplish this effectively involved the application of Māori philosophy into an entirely separate school system, known generally as the *Kaupapa Mātauranga*.

The Kaupapa Mātauranga Māori System

As of the late 1970s, public education in New Zealand tended to conduct courses in English and to use an instructivist style, in which a teacher directly imparted the knowledge to students through the use of lectures and activities. This traditional method of teaching, “where knowledge is determined by the teacher and children are required to leave who they are at the door of the classroom or school gate” (Bishop, 2003, p. 229), proved difficult for many Māori children, who were raised in a culture that promoted a more collective and participatory mode of knowledge acquisition. In addition, the pre-determined curricula tended to disregard the views of the Māori and only present the Pākehā perspective. These attributes of traditional education, taught in an English medium, furthered the belief that the government was assimilating the Māori into the Pākehā culture and worldview (Ministry of Education, 2004).

In order to combat what they assumed to be the failure of the education system, Māori elders decided to refer to the *Kaupapa Māori*, which “assumes the validity of Māori epistemological constructions of the world and refers to Māori centered approaches, frameworks and practices asserted by the notion of *tino rangatiratanga* (self determination) and the Treaty of Waitangi” (Lee, 2002, p. 64). In essence, *Kaupapa Māori* focused on using Māori culture and ideas to improve the positions of all Māori, including the children and youth, throughout New Zealand society. Let it be understood that this philosophy “challenges, questions, and critiques Pākehā hegemony. It does not reject or exclude Pākehā culture. It is not a one-or-the-other choice” (Pihama, Cram, & Walker, 2002, p. 33). In short, the issue was not that the Māori youth had been learning in a Pākehā classroom, but instead that not enough of the Māori culture had been incorporated into the classroom experience. The low educational achievement of the Māori youth was blamed on the lack of *Kaupapa Māori* in the public schools. The elders believed that the use and the embrace of the six familiar principles of *Kaupapa Māori* within the classrooms would draw students into the learning process and thus improve their achievement.

Smith (2002, as cited in Pihama et al., 2002) identifies six principles of *Kaupapa Māori*, all of which center on promoting the culture and remedying the problems facing the Māori. *Tino rangatiratanga*, or self-determination, underpins every other aspect of *Kaupapa Māori*. Without the will and the ability to take control over one’s life, improvement would not be possible. Furthermore, *tino rangatiratanga* calls for the rejection of the Pākehā-centric worldview, which is promulgated through the classroom (Bishop, Berryman, & Richardson, 2002). *Taonga tuku iho*, or cultural aspirations, stresses the necessity of passing down the traditional customs and language to the Māori youth. Therefore, the Māori have a moral obligation to promote a classroom setting that imparts these ‘treasures of the ancestors’ upon this next generation. *Ako Māori* is the culturally preferred pedagogy that stresses

reciprocal learning. Teachers should not simply instruct, but they should be willing to learn from their students as well. The style of teaching is participatory, allowing the students to build upon previous experiences and to construct their own knowledge (Bishop, 2003). *Kia piki ake i nga raruraru o te kainga* refers to socioeconomic mediation. The Māori must work to remedy poverty and domestic problems while still keeping the community and the *whānau* (see below) as most central to their lives. Improving the socioeconomic positions of the Māori will remove some of the barriers to proper education and knowledge acquisition. In addition, this principle focuses on creating a close relationship between the home and the classroom.

Whānau, or extended family, is perhaps one the most important aspects of the entire Māori culture. The *whānau* indicates that no child is truly ever alone, but instead the entire family is with him or her (Fraser, 2004). Some have even extended this to include the *whakapapa*, or the entire genealogy and all the ancestors (Lee, 2002). Therefore, teachers must understand the importance of the *whānau* in fostering a love for learning and in influencing the Māori children to actively attend and participate in the classrooms. Furthermore, the *whānau* for each student should become personally involved in the classrooms and the educational experience of the children. Finally, the *kaupapa*, or the collective philosophy, ties everything together into a coherent whole. This is what connects the numerous clans, tribes, and communities throughout Aotearoa.⁵ Without *kaupapa*, no unified front would be possible. These six principles comprise the *Kaupapa Māori*, which came to encompass the overarching method used to improve the educational achievement of the Māori students.

In 1982, realizing that the lack of *Kaupapa Māori* in the education system was contributing to the decline of *te reo Māori*, the elders from throughout Aotearoa convened a *hui* (large gathering) to discuss this problem and possible solutions (Smith, 2000). They realized that language and culture training had to occur early in the lives of their youth if it were to be sustainable. So, the elders returned to their communities with a plan to begin full immersion preschools that would serve as alternatives to mainstream preschools. Working with their local communities and *imi* (tribes), the elders started fifty *te kōhanga reo*, or Māori-medium preschools, in that first year. By 1996, 774 *te kōhanga reo* were scattered throughout the two islands (Smith, 2000). Aside from addressing the three causal factors previously stated, these schools also served two further purposes. First, they became extensions of the *whānau* and the *imi*. The *tikanga Māori* (customs) as well as cultural characteristics of the communities could be enforced through the classroom. Furthermore, the preschools taught and promoted *te reo Māori*, something deemed impossible in the mainstream preschools.

The second purpose deals with the attitudes of the Māori throughout Aotearoa and the new sense of empowerment that the creation of these schools

represented. In essence, “the revolution of 1982 may be significant not so much as a language revitalization initiative, but as a major shift in the thinking of Maori people with respect to no longer waiting for a ‘benevolent’ Pakeha society to deliver on Maori aspirations” (Smith, 2000, p. 64). The Māori chose to follow the self-determination of *tino rangatiratanga*, and do what they deemed best to improve the educational achievement of their children and to rejuvenate *te reo Māori*. While certain changes to mainstream public schools had occurred in the 1970s (discussed below), they did not produce results quickly enough. By starting *te kōhanga reo* in 1982, the Māori showed that they wanted to take control of the education system, which, through their children, directly impacted their cultures and lifestyles.

Over time, the Māori came to realize that their Māori-medium preschools accomplished very little, because the children who learned *te reo Māori* could not retain the knowledge or the language. “In many instances the children [who were bilingual upon leaving *te kōhanga reo*] lost their Maori language skills within weeks of attending monolingual English speaking monocultural schools” (Te Moana & Selby, 1996, p. 4). Therefore, with some funding and full accreditation from the Ministry of Education (MoE), and support from the Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Affairs), the *ivi* instituted new Māori-medium schools: *Kura kaupapa Māori*, primary schools; *whare kura*, secondary schools; and *whare wānanga*, tertiary institutions, which include polytechnic colleges and universities. These schools, being fairly new, still enroll just a small percentage of Māori. While in 1998, 40% of preschool age children were enrolled in *te kōhanga reo* (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001a), only 3% of the Māori youth were enrolled in *kura kaupapa Māori* (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001b). This percentage decreases even more through the *whare kura*, but then increases slightly for those Māori students attending the *whare wānanga*.

These Māori-medium institutions all belong to the *kaupapa mātāuranga Māori* system. Throughout Aotearoa, the schools use a standardized curriculum, *marautanga*, which is based on the *Kaupapa Māori* and incorporates the concept of reciprocal teaching. The courses are taught in *te reo Māori*, with the sole exception of English classes. The classes often combine numerous grade levels, thus allowing students to work at their own pace. This classroom management method eases the pressure placed on students to maintain the same speed found in the public schools. Doing this shifts the focus from the educational material to the creation of a community atmosphere. In addition, the schools and the curricula are based on *te reo me ōna tikanga*, the Māori language, culture, and customs. The primary goal of the courses is to address and improve the well-being of all their students (Titus, 2001). Thus, they follow the Māori conception of well-being, which, according to the *whare tapawha* (four walls of a house) model, consists of “four components: the physical, the mental and emotional (taken as one), the social and the spiritual” (Fraser, 2004, p. 89). In line with

the purpose of *Kaupapa Māori*, this model was adapted to fit education in *te ao Māori* (the Māori world). Therefore, all four walls became ‘paths’ or ‘strands’ interwoven to transform education into empowerment and well-being. These four strands are: *taba tinana*, the physical; *runga whatumana*, the emotional (which includes social); *hinegaro*, the intellectual; and *taba wairua*, the spiritual. They are essential to *ako Māori*, and thus are incorporated into alternative schools (Fraser, 2004). In addition to the focus on well-being, the students are often taught using narrative methods, which build on previous experiences students bring into the classrooms (Bishop, 2003). This allows the students to construct their own meanings, and allows the teachers to learn as well. This is the essence of the culturally preferred pedagogy, *ako Māori*.

Competent teachers from within the Māori *ivi* were chosen to lead these classrooms and to implement *ako Māori*. “Māori people view Māori teachers as being integral to the success of Māori students in schools” (Lee, 2002, p. 68). They believe that non-Māori teachers typically do not have the training necessary to handle Māori students. Therefore, Māori teachers, or *kaiako*, were essential, but not easily found. “Teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand has been available in six main centres and for those who wished to become teachers, but lived in rural regions and were unable to move from homes and families, the wish remained a dream” (Te Moana & Selby, 1996, p. 3). Those that did enter the government-run teaching centers were accused by their communities of having absorbed too much of the Pākehā culture and teaching methods, and thus were not considered fit to return and teach the youth in their communities. In 1991, this changed with a program started at the Wanganui Regional Community Polytechnic. The teacher training program, accredited through the MoE, allowed Māori chosen by their *ivi* to learn the culturally sensitive curricula without having to travel far and without becoming ‘tainted’ by the Pākehā. The teachers were taught to infuse their classrooms with aspects of Māori culture and to act in a way that did not offend their students. This included such sensitivities as knowing not to touch the Māori students on the head (Bishop et al. 2002), and understanding that not making eye contact is a sign of respect (Titus 2001), among other cultural norms. Cultural sensitivity is prominent in the teacher training program, which is still administered by the Polytechnic and the Wanganui *ivi* and has spread throughout Aotearoa. Local *ivi* manage each center, thus allowing for Māori control tailored to each particular region of Aotearoa. The government now partly funds this and other programs since they produce teachers who can relate to Māori students.

Perhaps the most essential component of the *kaupapa mātāuranga Māori* is the involvement of the *whānau* and the *ivi*. The tribes manage the schools and make up their Board of Trustees. Thus, each community has control over the best way to educate its children. The elders manage the application of culture, traditions, and language within the schools with the goal of creating

an atmosphere that promotes active learning. The curriculum remains constant throughout Aotearoa, with only slight changes depending on the community. Such involvement extends from the elders to the *whānau*, who “[are] involved with all the teachers in a variety of ways, all of which would fall under the banner of effective home and school collaboration” (Bishop et al., 2002, p. 57). In this sense, the classroom and the teachers become a part of the extended family. The teacher gains authority by becoming an ‘elder family member,’ and respect for the peer ‘siblings’ is more possible (Lee, 2002). Participation of the *whānau* in the school also helps protect against unruly behavior, which could lead to suspensions and premature school leavings of the Māori youth. For those who do commit an offense, some parents have even been known to complete their children’s offenses by working at the school or doing ground maintenance (Smith, 1997). Such involvement underlines the willingness of the *whānau* to help the achievement of the Māori students.

All these characteristics of *kaupapa mātauranga Māori* build on the *Kaupapa Māori* philosophy structure, which requires that Māori language and culture be infused into the system of education. According to the Māori communities, these schools would better prevent the Māori students from leaving the education system with poor achievement, and hopefully would reduce the gap between the Māori and the Pākehā.

Questioning the Efficacy of the School System

The institutions within the *kaupapa mātauranga Māori* system have improved the educational opportunities of the Māori youth. *Te reo Māori* is being taught instead of becoming a dead language (Titus, 2001) and the percentage of Māori students enrolled in tertiary institutions is increasing (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2002). Furthermore, as previously noted, the percent of Māori school leavers with no qualifications has dropped by more than half, from a mean of 85% in the late-1970s (Titus, 2001) to a mean of 35% in 2002 (Ministry of Education, 2004). This drop in school leavers with no qualification seems impressive, but at the same time the difference between the Māori and the Pākehā remains relatively unchanged. In fact, the “underachievement of Maori in the state schooling examination system [required for all students] is alarmingly high and demonstrably far worse than that for non-Maori students...the educational gap between Maori and Pakeha is not improving, but widening” (Smith, 2000, p. 61). In addition, the Māori consistently score far worse than their non-Māori peers in the subjects of reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The only subject in which they consistently excel is physical education (Crooks & Caygill, 1999)⁶. In short, there is much room for improvement.

Observable signs of improvement must be qualified by three caveats. First, while I cannot deny that these schools have helped to save *te reo Māori* from a possible extinction, they have not created the large, positive change that the Māori elders had envisioned. By 1995,

13 years after the program started, only 7% of Māori aged 16-24 years old had a medium to high fluency in *te reo Māori*. Of all these youth, 39% still could not speak the language at all (Te Puni Kōkiri, 1999). While other researchers may present different data, they all agree that too few of the Māori are fluent in the language, and that over a third of the youth still cannot speak *te reo Māori*.⁷ In sum, the percent of those Māori able to fluently speak the language is still low, suggesting that the schools within the *kaupapa mātauranga Māori* system have failed in their most basic goal.

The second caveat deals with those students who enroll in tertiary institutions. This enrollment information is important for two reasons. First, it gauges the efficacy of the entire *kaupapa mātauranga Māori* system. Those who learn better within the setting of *te reo me ōna tikanga* will hopefully choose not to leave before enrolling in the tertiary institutions. These students may also choose to continue in the Māori-medium system, and thus attend the *whare wānanga*. Second, high enrollment in tertiary institutions improves the chances Māori youth have to compete effectively in the vocational and professional workforce. This is important for the survival and the growth of the Māori communities throughout Aotearoa.

Current statistics provide hope. The percentage of Māori students enrolled in tertiary institutions has increased by 60% between 1994 and 1998 (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2002). In addition, the percentage of Māori attending tertiary institutions has risen to an all-time high of 22.8%, an increase “largely related to the growth of wānanga” (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 75). Finally, the percentage of Māori students enrolled in tertiary institutions is generally greater than for non-Māori students.

However, this welcome news is misleading for two reasons. First, most of the Māori enrolled in tertiary institutions (82.2%) enroll in ‘sub-degree’ programs (Ministry of Education, 2004), while only 47% of non-Māori (mainly Pākehā) do the same (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2002). This means that most of the Māori are working toward a certificate and will not attain a degree. Such qualifications indicate the readiness of the students to enter the labor market, and the general assumption is that specific qualifications prepare the students for particular jobs. This difference makes it difficult for the Māori to compete effectively with their Pākehā counterparts in the job market. The most common Pākehā jobs in 1997 were as clerks, professionals and administrators. The Māori, conversely, inhabited the lower-paying, less-prestigious positions of service workers, machine operators, and low-skilled occupations⁸ (Te Puni Kōkiri, 1998).⁹

There is little indication that Māori culture influences the choice of these certificate and sub-degree qualifications. More likely the main reason for the Māori’s choices involves their economic and social situations. The impoverished status of many Māori probably pushes them to prefer academic paths that lead to employment as quickly as possible. In addition, many Māori have

“multiple obligations [to] ancestral home, ancestral land, extended family, nuclear family, and family home” (Durie, 1996, p. 5), all of which may compel Māori youth to return home more quickly, as well as to help their families financially. These factors may explain why the majority of Māori youth in tertiary institutions choose sub-degree programs.

It must be remembered that tertiary institutions consist of polytechnic colleges, *whare wānanga*, and universities. Many of these institutions do not require their students to be in degree programs. The perceived inferiority of the certifications and vocational degrees favored by the Māori, compared to the bachelor and higher degrees favored by the Pākehā, automatically place the Māori at a disadvantage (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2000). The Māori graduates are less valued upon entrance to the labor market than the Pākehā, which is reflected in their lower average earnings.¹⁰ Therefore, it can be inferred that the numbers of increased student enrollment presented above do not carry the same meaning or weight as if they were to represent Pākehā enrollment, simply because both groups are in different types of graduate programs. Using tertiary institution enrollment to directly compare Māori and Pākehā achievement can provide misleading results.

The second issue involved with post-secondary school enrollment deals with socioeconomic considerations. While there was a significant percent increase in Māori attending the tertiary institutions, which is wholly laudable, we cannot give exclusive credit to the Māori-medium schools. In actuality, the majority of Māori students graduating from the tertiary institutions are over 25 years of age, which is older than for the average age for non-Māori.¹¹ Many Māori men and women do not go directly into the tertiary institutions after secondary school. Instead, many leave school altogether and return to it later to improve their employment opportunities (Ministry of Education, 2004). Thus, the 60% jump in tertiary enrollments can be attributed to both the general increase in Māori students who enter these institutions immediately following secondary school¹² and the influx of older Māori adults returning to school in order to better their job prospects. In sum, tertiary institution enrollment does not necessarily mean that the Māori-medium school system is successful.

The final reason to question the success of the *kaupapa mātāuranga Māori* involves the other schooling system running parallel to the Māori-medium system. In 1975, in response to the unrest of the Māori communities, the New Zealand government instituted *Taba Māori*, the first of its bicultural programs, into its mainstream public schools. In 1977, the government continued its effort to make the schools more amenable to Māori youth by introducing bilingual programs (Titus, 2001). Both types have evolved over time, and now most mainstream schools have classrooms or entire programs dedicated to either *tikanga Māori* or *te reo Māori*. Bicultural classes involve a greater teaching of the heritage and traditions

of the Māori students. In addition, the teachers make an effort to behave in a culturally sensitive manner. Bilingual courses are simply bicultural courses taught in *te reo Māori* between 30-80% of the time (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001b). Immersion courses are taught in the language over 81% of the time (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2001a), and tend to use the *ako Māori* reciprocal teaching style more than the traditional, instructivist style. Many immersion programs mimic the alternative schools by combining grade levels with the goal of allowing “students to move at their own pace without the shame of being held back” (Roberts, 1996, p. 1). The students are not required to keep up with others in the mainstream programs, but simply to graduate with similar knowledge. An increasing number of mainstream schools are designating entire classes and even school wings to these three program types, also known as strands. All students have the choice to join any of these strands. Such diversification in mainstream schools has attracted many Māori. While “[t]hirty-eight per cent of all Maori enrolments in early childhood attend a kohanga reo” (May, 2002, p. 28), as of 2002, once the students finish preschool, over 90% of them choose to attend the mainstream primary and secondary schools (Bishop, 2003). This immense difference between those attending the Māori-medium and the mainstream schools gives cause to reconsider the successes inherent in the former.

Statistics on Māori achievement improvements must be weighed against this new information. The high Māori enrollment in mainstream schools may account for the lack of widespread language rejuvenation. These schools may also be more responsible for the increase in Māori enrollments in tertiary institutions than alternative schools. For example, we cannot give full credit to the Māori-medium schools for the 37% of Māori students going directly into the tertiary programs in 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2004). In order to accurately assess this information, research must be conducted to see the proportion of this 37% that comes from the 90% of students in the mainstream schools and from the approximately 10% of students in the alternative schools. Similarly, we would need to reconsider what percent of the 17.8% of the Māori students who left school the highest achievable in secondary school in 1997 came from the mainstream or the Māori-medium schools. Only with research that accounts for the dominance of the mainstream schools can we determine whether the *kaupapa mātāuranga Māori* or the mainstream schools are making the greatest impact on the achievements of the Māori youth.

We must account for these three factors when assessing the successes of the *kaupapa mātāuranga Māori* in particular and the educational system in general. However, this is not to say that these programs will not make a positive change. They have taken the right steps and are on the right path to raising Māori achievement in education. The formation of the schools and the implementation of new policies will not make immediate

improvements. The policy makers, the *iwis*, and Māori parents and students must have patience and continue to support these schools to see positive results in the future.

Improving Indigenous Education in New Zealand and Elsewhere

Throughout the world, indigenous populations face many obstacles in providing equitable education for their youth. Governments often choose not to help these marginalized groups. This institutional barrier is only one of numerous issues that may make progress difficult, if not impossible. Other challenges include the lack of financial capital, community apathy, teacher imbalances, uncomfortable classroom settings, and negative public opinion. The Māori, with the help of the New Zealand government, have successfully overcome most of these concerns. Therefore, this case provides an excellent example for those societies hoping to improve the educational achievement of their indigenous populations. But there are still challenges for the Māori: they and the New Zealand government must jointly address the issue of public opinion.

Addressing the Stigma

A growing public concern regarding the true intentions of these schools presents the greatest obstacle to their success. Many Pākehā see bilingual programs and Māori-medium schools as separatist. This belief refers to any program or school that purposefully separates the Māori from the non-Māori. Therefore, this stigma applies not only to alternative schools, but also to the immersion strands found within mainstream schools. While many Pākehā parents recognize the ‘social justice’ side of such programs, they do not understand the reasons for distinguishing between the Pākehā and the Māori. They see these schools as a form of favoritism toward a minority group. Such opinions often make schools, both the alternative and the mainstream, reluctant to change their curricula and to create entire programs devoted to immersion. In addition, the viewpoint that these programs represent reverse discrimination in a society where New Zealanders “are all equal and one people” (Doerr, 2004, p. 241) promotes caution among the non-Māori in supporting the Māori-medium schools. In such situations, many Māori students are afraid to enter the programs designed for them because they themselves may seem separatist or even superior in the eyes of their peers. Māori parents may choose to remove their children early from the alternative schools and place them into the mainstream system, thus contributing to the severe drop in enrollment in *kaupapa mātāuranga Māori*.¹³

To prevent this stigma from stagnating the alternative school system, the government must undertake a public awareness campaign in order to better educate the Māori and the Pākehā alike about the benefits of these programs. A partnership between the MoE, the Te Puni

Kōkiri, and possibly the Ministry for Culture and Heritage may be best for designing a campaign that reaches all New Zealanders. However, the government should not bear the entire responsibility for addressing the stigma. Māori elders (and many *pasifika* leaders) must actively press for inclusion into such governmental partnerships. In addition, parent-teacher organizations involved in the alternative schools should organize grassroots campaigns within their own *iwis*, with a bipartite goal. First, such activities would give the Māori a greater understanding of the opinions and attitudes found within their *iwis*, thus giving them the ability to address them better. Second, a localized effort, where the campaigners explain the merits of these schools, may have the effect of allaying the concerns of their neighbors. In sum, only by working to remove the stigma of separatism will these schools have a better chance of success within a predominantly Pākehā country.

Providing Educational Opportunities for Indigenous Groups

The New Zealand case presents four lessons for governments of other countries wanting to address similar concerns regarding the education of indigenous populations. First, and most importantly, courses and/or alternative schools must incorporate indigenous knowledge and must be sensitive to cultural and customary norms. Doing this helps to promote a safe atmosphere for indigenous students. Such incorporation has been accomplished within Native American and Alaskan Native schools throughout the United States and Canada (Lipka, 2002). In addition, alternative schools in New Caledonia have been imbued with *la coutume*, the Kanak equivalent to *Kaupapa Māori* (Clanché, 1999). In both situations, the educational achievement of the indigenous students has improved, and dropout and suspension rates have fallen. Recognizing indigenous knowledge, as previously discussed, “has proved invaluable in bringing students [indigenous and non-indigenous] on to a higher plane of respect and appreciation of Indigenous history, culture and society” (Brady, 1997, p. 417). In addition, students will not have to hide their cultures and work to conform to others in the classrooms.

Second, interested individuals from indigenous communities must have an equal chance of becoming teachers. Traveling far from home may dissuade many passionate individuals from pursuing a teaching career. Therefore, starting accredited training colleges closer to indigenous communities will improve access for those who wish to become educators. In addition, by creating more opportunities for indigenous teachers, they will teach in a culturally sensitive manner, thus having a better chance of successfully communicating the curricula to their students. This assumption, however, depends on teachers’ training materials. Training centers and colleges, though they may be located within the communities, may promote assimilation by transmitting the preferred pedagogy and the perspectives of the

majority. Therefore, teacher training materials should incorporate the indigenous cultures and customs in order to successfully communicate the education curricula in a manner that is respectful to and preserves indigenous students' worldviews. Though such measures will not guarantee the academic success of the students, since "[t]he quality of teaching can explain up to 60 percent of the variation in a learner's educational achievement" (Ministry of Education, 2004, p. 41), teachers who can relate to their students may be able to create a safe space where they can grow and mature.

Third, governments must involve indigenous communities in the education process. "[S]chooling ought to be a partnership in which both the school and 'indigenous' peoples, aware and proud of their language and cultural practices, represent the force for creating a richer pedagogical environment" (Manu'atu & Mere, 2002, p. 2). Such involvement is important for three reasons. First, it empowers the indigenous communities to design schools that best meet the needs of their students. This can be achieved by allowing tribal and community elders to serve as advisors to the schools, and perhaps even act on the school boards. Second, involvement induces the families and the communities "to take responsibility for their children's education" (Mfum-Mensah, 2004, p. 143). In the case of New Zealand, the involvement of the *whānau* in the alternative schools' classrooms has led to "fewer late, absent, and dropout behaviour" (Smith, 1997, p. 125) than that found with Māori students in the mainstream schooling system. Third, and most generally, narrowing the separation between schools and families will bring the students' worldviews into the classrooms. In many indigenous societies, families and family networks represent an essential part of children's cultures, thus involving these families will better tie the students' classrooms to their home-lives. Furthermore, student perspectives will be validated. Insensitive comments from teachers and other students towards indigenous students, even those that are inadvertent, will most likely decrease compared to those found within mainstream public schools.

The fourth, and perhaps the most difficult recommendation, involves the control over and the politicization of schools. Initiatives aimed at improving the achievement of indigenous youth and the incorporation of indigenous knowledge, teachers, and communities, must come from and be managed by these communities themselves. Essentially, governments must be willing to step back, and the indigenous groups must be ready to commit to such efforts. For example, one of the problems inherent in the failed alternative primary education programs in Ghana was that the government forced the Pastoral Basic Schools into towns and tribes (Mfum-Mensah, 2004). The schools had many features similar to those in New Zealand, including community management. Unfortunately, the communities were not prepared to administrate such schools. Therefore, the schools had little effect, and in fact caused conflict within

the tribes.¹⁴ In essence, these schools should be created only when the communities are ready to shoulder the responsibility inherent in managing them.

Once the schools are started, the governments must be willing to relax their control over them. The most important reason for this is that, by granting some control to the indigenous communities, accusations of assimilation and colonization lose potency. Parents will be less concerned about their children losing their culture to outside influences if the educational systems are managed by and located within their communities. In Guatemala, a country with a history of a terrible civil war, indigenous Mayan schools are appearing throughout the highlands, and have the positive effect of strengthening "the cultural identity of the Mayas" (Heckt, 1999, p. 335) as separate from that of the Guatemalan majority. However, the alternate school system will make a positive and lasting change, only if the government gives it accreditation, and the system is considered equal to the public schools. A student should have the choice to attend either and still succeed in the eyes of the government and the job market.

Aotearoa/New Zealand is succeeding in all four areas, mainly because the government was willing to let it happen. The *kaupapa mātauranga Māori* has flourished over these past 22 years simply because the New Zealand government has supported it. Throughout much of the world, governments are encouraging indigenous education programs because they recognize the benefits to their citizens. However, in many places, conflict and even violence between the indigenous groups and the governments obviate the possibility of successful, funded, and accredited alternative schools. In such situations, the four lessons discussed above will accomplish very little unless these animosities cease. Successful alternative schools may not be possible without governments and indigenous communities willing to work together.

In Aotearoa/New Zealand, such cooperation has begun the path to improved educational achievement. The government and the Māori communities have given priority to the widening gap between the Māori and the Pākehā students. The Māori-medium school system has successfully begun to address the issues facing Māori children, even though it may be too early to see significant changes. Only with time will the cooperation between the government, the *imi*, and the *whānau* bear fruit in improved achievement. Nevertheless, giving control to the indigenous communities and infusing the classrooms with the language and culture are the best ways to create better educational opportunities for Māori youth. The alternative schools, which follow the *Kaupapa Māori* philosophy, are the perfect first step.

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Glossary

- Kura Kaupapa Māori* – immersion primary schools
- Ako Māori* – culturally preferred pedagogy based on reciprocal learning
- Aotearoa* – New Zealand, Land of the Long White Cloud
- Hinegaro* – the intellectual strand of education
- Hui* – large gathering
- Iwi* – tribe
- Kaiako* – teacher
- Kaupapa Māori* – collective philosophy of the Māori-centered approach to life
- Kia Piki Ake I Nga Raruraru O Te Kainga* – socioeconomic mediation
- Marautanga* – curriculum
- Kaupapa Mātauranga Māori* – General term for Māori-centered alternative school system, which is considered separate from the mainstream school run by the government
- Pākehā* – European New Zealanders
- Pasifika* – The category of New Zealanders from the Pacific Islands, mainly including the Tongans and the Fijians.
- Ranga Whatumanawa* – the emotional strand of education
- Taba Māori* – The original bicultural programs, introduced in 1975
- Taba Tinana* – the physical strand of education
- Taba Wairua* – the spiritual strand of education
- Tāonga Tuku Ibo* – cultural aspirations
- Te ao Māori* – the Māori world
- Te Kōhanga Reo* – immersion preschools
- Te Puni Kōkiri* – The New Zealand Ministry of Māori Affairs
- Te Reo Māori* – the Māori language
- Te Reo Me Ōna Tikanga* – Language, culture, and customs
- Tikanga Māori* – Māori customs
- Tino Rangatiratanga* – self-determination
- Whānau* – extended family
- Whare Kura* – immersion secondary schools
- Whare Wānanga* – immersion tertiary school
- Whare Tapanha* – Four walls of a house, symbolizing physical, mental/emotional, social, and spiritual well-being

End Notes

1 In this paper, I will use a significant number of Māori words, since scholarship in this field makes ample use of them. When the movement to revitalize te reo Māori started in the 1960s, the government and its programs attempted to use Māori terms whenever possible. For this reason, I am including a glossary of terms used at the end of this paper.

2 The New Zealand government uses the term ‘school leavers’ to represent those students who stop attending classes or who pull their enrollment, either by graduating or by prematurely dropping out.

3 The New Zealand government uses the term ‘qualification’ to designate possible graduations, degrees, certificates, or honors a student can receive. A student who drops out before completing secondary school receives no qualification. The University Bursary

is the highest qualification a student can receive.

4 The category of ‘Non-Māori’ consists not just of the Pākehā, but also of the East Asians living in New Zealand and the Pasifika, including the Tongans, the Fijians, and other Pacific Islanders.

5 Means “Land of the Long, White Cloud.” This is the Māori name for New Zealand. I will be using this term when discussing the Māori, and I will use ‘New Zealand’ when discussing the Pākehā or the government.

6 These findings are from the National Education Monitoring Project, which took data from 4th and 8th year classrooms in the mainstream school system from the years 1995-1998. They have not yet examined the Māori-medium schools.

7 Bishop (2003) claims that, as of 2003, “[o]nly 6% of Maori remain in the high fluency language speaking category, a drop from some 18% in the 1970s...and this is mainly among the elderly” (222), while Doerr (2004) has a somewhat more optimistic attitude. She claims that, by 1997, 22.08% of all Māori above age 16 had a medium to high fluency in te reo Māori. Still, even she states that 40% could not speak the language.

8 Unfortunately, the statistics on this topic are unclear as to what constitutes ‘elementary,’ or low-skilled occupations. This category most likely represents those jobs not included in any other grouping.

9 More research is needed to determine how the choice of tertiary qualifications influences the job a person gets. Are these occupations filled mostly with Māori who have certificates and degrees, or who never went through post-secondary education?

10 According to Te Puni Kōkiri (1998), Māori households make, on average, \$10,000 less than non-Māori workers. While the mean incomes for both Māori and non-Māori alike had risen over the previous ten years, the growth has favored the latter group, thus widening the earnings gap.

11 Fifty-seven percent of Māori students, compared to 48% of non-Māori students, are over 25 years old upon graduation (Te Puni Kōkiri 2002).

12 From 1999 to 2001, the percentage of Māori students continuing on to tertiary institutions following secondary school rose from 29% to 37% (Ministry of Education 2004).

13 While examples of this do exist, this assertion is simply conjecture. Empirical research should be done to see how great a factor the stigma is on the drop of enrollment in the alternative schools.

14 The tribe members began bickering about the best ways to manage such schools, thus leading Mfum-Mensah (2004) to the conclusion that these schools may not be the best way to educate the indigenous children. I disagree with his assessment, and instead believe that the effort should be bottom-up instead of top-down, but only if the communities are ready to handle the responsibilities.