

# INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL SECTION ON MĀORI CULTURE AND EDUCATION

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In 1992 I expressed my concern that there was a lack of a cultural consciousness among mainstream educators in New Zealand. This problem had both contributed to the belittlement of Māori ways of knowing and Māori preferred principles and practices of teaching and learning. One of the major outcomes of the continuation of this colonial mentality has been that mainstream educators have been slow to acknowledge the importance of culture and cultural differences as components of successful participation by Māori in all aspects of education. I extended that theme in *Culture Counts* in 1999 and addressed the importance of culture in theorising about education in general, educational research, and classroom interactions. I also addressed this theme further in my inaugural professorial address at the University of Waikato in the same year. Essentially, my concern has long been that far too few educational researchers and practitioners have considered the important place that students' culture and language plays in educational achievement. I am, therefore, pleased to be asked to write an introduction to this collection of papers that place culture and language at the centre of their practice and theorising.

This collection of papers gives us a detailed look at the type of theorising, policy making, and practice that might be necessary in order for us to break the neo-colonial dominance of monoculturalism and monolingualism. These papers illustrate that when the concept of culture is placed at the centre of the theorising about the activity under consideration, major shifts in thinking by the practitioner and improvements in outcomes for students occur. It is rapidly becoming clear that such theorising holds the answer to many of the problems that have faced Māori people in education for some time and, more generally, has affected the educational achievement of students other than those who belong to the majority culture.

Stephen May's inaugural address takes up this theme and identifies some of the implications that the move from a monocultural worldview involves for language education, in particular the need for a nationally co-ordinated and focused language policy.

Ken Wilson identifies the importance of a sound culturally-focused theoretical base when developing an analysis of the Treaty of Waitangi. This analysis suggests answers to the increasing demands for beginning teachers to address the founding document of New Zealand in their practice.

Ann Milne, the Principal of Clover Park Middle School, identifies how her school has been successfully restructured along cultural/language lines and how this re-focusing has created major improvements in the students' educational achievement.

Deborah Fraser and Hokimate Paraha take the Treaty of Waitangi as a culturally-generated metaphor for a power-sharing approach to planning and evaluating educational activities in schools. They discuss the theoretical base for this practice and give clear examples of implementation strategies.

Geraldine Harvey identifies how the integration of traditional focus group methodology with Māori cultural aspirations, preferences, and practices at its core, termed Kaupapa Māori Research, can provide an appropriate framework for conducting research with young Māori people into their leisure activities.

These papers and the others included in this section, all illustrate the usefulness of locating culture at the centre of the exercise, whether it be a question of policy, of school structure, of pedagogy, of research, or of addressing the Treaty of Waitangi in practice.

Kia ora rawa ki a koutou.

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