

NZPF Summit

Principles to guide New Zealand policy makers in the development of public education policy for New Zealand

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Policy Principles – in White Spaces

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Kia ora tatou

Thank you for the invitation to be here today. I hope I am able to add to the collective wisdom we've heard from all of the speakers during the Summit, even though we have now reached the end of the day when everyone is anxiously keeping an eye on their flight times!

As the white principal of a decile one school in Otara, that started as an intermediate, changed to become a middle school, grew into two schools which have now merged again to become a college – and where there are no Pakeha children, I'm certainly a provider of Maori and Pasifika education. As the mother, grandmother and great grandmother of Maori children I am also a consumer of our product – and I haven't been a happy customer since my children entered secondary school almost 30 years ago.

In 1994, I took on the job of principal of what was then known as Clover Park Intermediate School. **Also in 1994**, the new *English Curriculum for New Zealand Schools* was published. The word "literacy" was only used once in this document. In fact, the term "literacy" was really only used back then in relation to "illiteracy." It wasn't until 1998, when the then National Government announced it intended to develop a national Literacy and Numeracy strategy and the National Literacy Taskforce was appointed, that we began to see the term appear in policy, strategy and curriculum statements.

How then, in just 12-13 years, has it become the holy grail, and, together with its terrible twin, numeracy, our **primary indicator** of schooling success? How did we conflate literacy scores with learning and "academic achievement" and why did we allow ourselves to be coerced into speaking in percentages and test scores? And how, is over a decade of **prioritising literacy** working for us? Not very well, according to the latest PISA results which find that:

The reading performance of New Zealand students, on average, did not change between 2000 and 2009.

Let's not pat ourselves on the back about maintaining our high PISA ranking, conveniently forgetting that, that means we have done little about the inequity of our results – that little, embarrassing, predominantly brown, problem we offensively refer to as, "the tail". Around a third of Pasifika and a quarter of Māori students did not show reading proficiency above Level 1a in PISA 2009. (Ministry of Education, 2011a)

I don't need to tell you about these statistics either – they are an indictment on our system and there is also little change over an extended time. Maori students are:

- 2.6 times more likely than Pakeha students to be stood down from school
- Almost 4 times more likely to be excluded
- 3 times more likely to be frequent truants

- 2 times more likely to be granted early leaving exemptions before age 15
- 6 times more likely to be 'non-enrolled' (pushed out) - 11 times in Manukau City
- 2.3 times LESS likely (22.6 % in 2009) to attain a university entrance qualification
(Ministry of Education, 2011b)

So my first **principle** is **we need to stop trying to get better at doing the same things**. It's simply not working!!

The model of learning in Kia Aroha College, therefore has been developed from the **principle** that **we will not be complicit in perpetuating a system that has failed, and continues to fail, our Maori and Pasifika learners**.

Our work is underpinned by this very simple premise. If we look at a child's colouring book – before it has any colour added to it, we think of the page as blank. It's actually not blank – it's white – that white background is just 'there' and we don't think much about it.

Not only is the background uniformly white, the lines are already there and they dictate where the colour is allowed to go. When our children are small, they don't care where they put the colours, but as they get older they colour in more and more carefully – they learn about the place of colour and the importance of staying within the pre-determined boundaries and expectations.

That's what happens in our mainstream, or what I am calling our whitestream, schools – that white background is the norm. When we talk about multiculturalism and diversity what we are really referring to is the colour of the children, or their difference from that white norm – it's really about how they don't fit perfectly inside our lines. If the colour of the space doesn't change we are still in the business of assimilation, relegating them to the margins, no matter how many school reform initiatives, new curricula, strategic plans, or National Standards we dream up. What **we** are trying to do is change the colour of the space – so that the space fits our children and they don't have to constantly adjust to fit in.

Each year I ask our senior students to identify what they think are White Spaces. Here are some of their definitions. I like the last one!

- Anything you accept as "normal" for Maori – when it's really not
- Any situation that prevents, or works against you "being Maori" or who you are – requires you to "be" someone else and leave your beliefs behind
- Anything that allows you to require less of yourself – to have low expectations because you just accept that's OK
- Anything that reinforces stereotypes and negative ideas about Maori
- White spaces are everywhere – even in your head!

And they are certainly in our heads. If we want to make real change for Maori and Pasifika learners in our schools we have to name the **elephant in the classroom that drives our education policy**. The **principle**, that no one talks about, is that **our education system is predicated on an arrogant assumption of white privilege that dominates what counts as knowledge and achievement**, and which alienates our Maori and Pasifika children and their whānau – and all of our solutions to the inequity which we create and then daily perpetuate, are based on "fixing" the problem or as David Stovall (2006) says, "Giving these poor people of color what they so desperately need."

Instead of fundamental conversations about the whiteness of our education system and the Eurocentric knowledge it values we get the rhetoric of school reform and standardisation - a mentality which Kris Gutierrez claims, "**accepts substantial inequality as a neutral baseline for**

educational practice and reform and, simultaneously, enshrines the status quo” so then that whiteness, or “the status quo camouflaged as color-blind, becomes the uncontested baseline of educational reform” (Gutiérrez et al 2002, pp.336,337).

That thinking needs to stop! So does all the rhetoric and the academic research gravy train that emanate from this deficit-based, evidence-obsessed, neo-liberal, managerial, assimilationist thinking. I think, if you include policy-makers along with the word “researchers”, Antwi Akom says it best!

What Black communities/communities of color need (and white communities too) are researchers who care about the community, real people who want to work collaboratively with the community instead of continuing the age-old academic tradition of exploiting the shit out of it. (Akom, 2008, p.254)

Wally Penetito (2002) says,

If there is an emerging educational vision among Maori it is the desire for an **education that enhances what it means to be Maori** – so simple, yet so profound.

As Pakeha school leaders and policy makers it’s time we started thinking more deeply about what that means. A crucial **principle** that we have to understand is that **“as Maori” is not the same as “as Pakeha.” We need to authentically value other knowledges and broaden our narrow technical definition of “achievement”. The absolute right for an education that fits Maori and Pasifika learners should be enshrined in all policy.**

Mason Durie (2003, p.199) is specific about “As Maori.” It means, he says “to have access to te ao Maori, – access to language, culture, marae, tikanga and resources.”

That means that just because we can put a reading result alongside a Maori child’s name, or show that Maori children are meeting or exceeding national norms or standards in reading or writing or maths – or analysing these data and making comparisons with other ethnicities - **does not make it achievement as Maori** – it’s just reading or writing or maths achievement – there is **nothing Maori** about it - nor is reducing Maori or Pasifika students’ truancy, or stand downs and suspensions, or any other interventions which start from a position of deficit, any measure of our **children’s** success.

Until we get this clear we are all chasing the wrong goals. If ‘achievement as Maori’ is exactly the same as ‘achievement as Pakeha’, what’s the point of the intent of *Ka Hikitia*? If we use no indicators of Maori knowledge whatsoever and we define Maori achievement in Pakeha terms, which **we** determine **for** our Maori learners, how can that possibly be achievement “as Maori”?

So I want to give you a very brief glimpse of what achievement and success look like for us in Kia Aroha College. Although I am talking mainly about Maori achievement today, all of the work we do is replicated for our Samoan, Tongan and Cook Island Maori learners.

We have three goals – the goals of critical pedagogy (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade 2008)

- empowered cultural identity
- academic achievement , and
- action for social change

These goals are aligned to our **Power Lenses model of learning**, (Milne, 2004) which considers self-learning – strong secure relationships, cultural identity, and whānau-centred practice equally as important as academic achievement.

And we are serious about whānau. On Wednesday we welcomed back into the school this newly released research report, *Thriving in Practice*,¹ (O’Sullivan, 2011) from the Families Commission, whose researcher spent two years being part of every aspect of our school life. Our senior students told her:

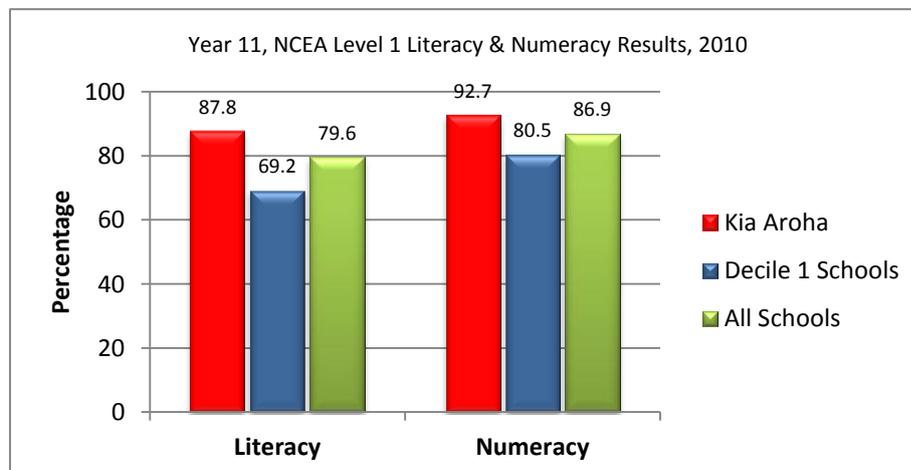
*We’re about whānau
Whether it’s your whānau kura
Or your whānau at home
Your up-north whānau
Or the whānau you never met
When you’re together, that’s whānau
That’s the connection*

*I leave my house walk down the road
And I’m home again (p.36)*

That’s achievement as far as I’m concerned!

I can talk about our students’ academic outcomes if I have to. They are actually very good! These are our Year 11, Level 1 NCEA Literacy and Numeracy results in 2010. These are the results for all decile one schools – and for all schools nationally. I could call this “success” I suppose, but I would **never** call it Maori achievement – it’s just literacy and numeracy achievement.

Literacy & Numeracy Requirements, NCEA Level 1, Year 11 students, 2010
(NZQA 2011)



I refuse to talk about this sort of achievement however, unless I can talk about their learning and development ‘as Maori’ at the same time. I couldn’t care less about national norms, or reading and writing in English, **as a PRIMARY goal** – because it’s **not enough** and our Maori – and our Pasifika - learners **deserve better** – and, **the minute we define our students’ success in those terms, we negate all the other learning we think is equally important.**

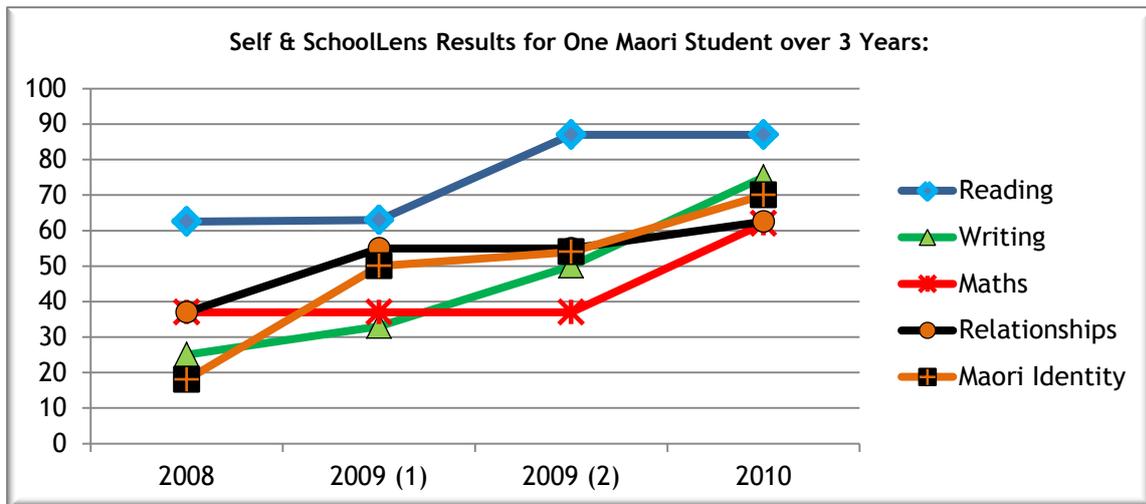
We believe our Maori learners are on a journey from unrealised to unlimited potential. Our goal is that by the time they reach the end of their time in our school, their relationships as active, contributing, members of our whanau are strong - and their identity ‘as Maori’ is secure. We’ve developed this matrix, with indicators based on Mason Durie’s (1998, p.58) four key ‘markers’ for Maori cultural identity:

¹ <http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz/publications-resources/thriving-in-practice>

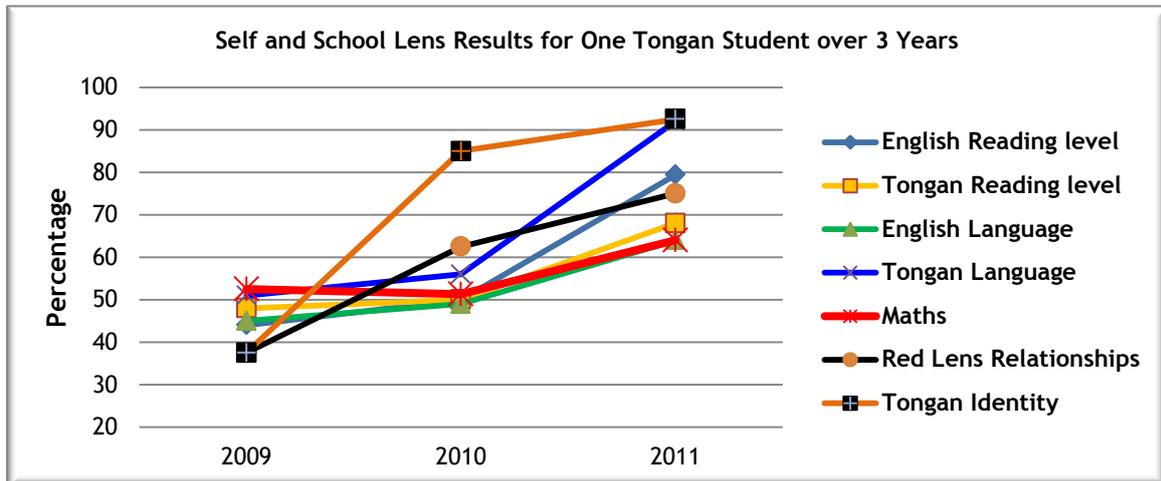
- identification as Maori,
- cultural knowledge and understanding,
- access to and participation in Maori society and
- communication – in Te Reo Maori

Using these indicators, we can show progress in that “self-learning” - identity lens – for the whole school, by gender, by year level or as individuals. And **we can put all our assessments together** to show **dramatically** that progress in cultural identity and relationships shift FIRST – and other learning follows.

Self and School Lens Progress over 3 years; Year 11 Maori Male



Self and School Lens Progress over 3 years; Year 11 Tongan Male



I can show profiles like these for the majority of our students –progress that certainly does NOT come from making literacy our primary goal, or giving it a focus it doesn't deserve. We can relax about progress in literacy or numeracy because we know exactly what other learning is happening. **Try showing that against National Standards!**

We are very clear that learning in the self, identity leans is legitimate end-point learning, in its own right. It is not intended as a stepping stone to some warm fuzzy self-esteem that will then enhance a student's reading and writing in English. Our data show clearly that happens – but the intent is to develop cultural knowledge first.

For us, achievement as Maori means developing **Warrior-Scholars**, Maori learners, secure in their own identity, competent in all aspects of the Maori world, critical thinkers for social change, with all the academic qualifications they need to go out and change the world. **This is our graduate profile for our Year 13 students.**

Kia Aroha College Year 13 Graduate Profile - Te Whanau o Tupuranga



My research (Milne, 2010) identifies **seven principles** that our work at Kia Aroha College has in common with **three highly effective critical, social justice driven programmes** which are successful with students of colour in communities **similar to ours** in the United States. **These principles** are crucial to the success of our Maori and Pasifika learners:

- (1) **Race, ethnicity and cultural identity are central to curriculum and practice.**
- (2) **Parents must have authentic voice.** The changes we have managed to achieve on our school campus for example have been the result of over 20 years of struggle against education bureaucracy - **change shouldn't be so difficult**
- (3) **The building of relationships of trust and care is crucial and genuine.** These programmes are based in **authentic caring, love, whanau, aroha**. These are "our kids" not other people's children (Delpit, 1995)
- (4) **The curriculum is based in the community and in the realities youth experience in education, and in society.** These programmes are informed by critical race theory which sees racism as a 'given,' and are driven by **social justice goals for humanisation, conscientisation and transformation through critical praxis.**
- (5) **Learning draws heavily on other knowledges—traditional cultural knowledge and practices, youth knowledge and culture, and community knowledge.** Students are highly engaged with **new multimedia digital literacies**
- (6) **Students see a critically conscious purpose for their learning.** There is a high stakes 'end result' where students present their research to a wide range of audiences
- (7) **Learning is intentionally counter-hegemonic.**

Indian philosopher Krishnamurti said:

It is no measure of health to be well-adjusted to a profoundly sick society.

And it's no measure of achievement, to have adjusted our Maori or Pasifika children to fit into the profoundly damaging white spaces in our schooling system.

So to summarise, here is my list.

Kia ora

1. Getting better at doing the same things isn't working for Maori and Pasifika learners
2. We will not be complicit in perpetuating a system that continues to fail our Maori and Pasifika learners
3. Our education system and policy is predicated on an assumption of white privilege which dominates what counts as knowledge and achievement and which alienates Maori and Pasifika learners
4. We are accepting substantial inequality as the uncontested baseline for educational reform, and thus enshrining the colour-blind status quo
5. Education must enhance what it means to "be" Maori and learn "as Maori". "As Maori" is not the same as "as Pakeha"
6. We need to authentically value other knowledges and broaden our narrow technical definition of "achievement". This includes traditional, cultural knowledge, youth and new media literacies
7. The absolute right for an education that fits Maori and Pasifika learners should be enshrined in all policy.
8. Literacy and numeracy or NCEA scores are not Maori or Pasifika achievement
9. Race, ethnicity and culture must be central to curriculum and practice
10. Parents must have authentic voice and changing existing structures should not be bound up in a bureaucratic minefield. Whanau is central to learning
11. Relationships of trust and authentic deep caring (whanaungatanga) are crucial to learning
12. Learning contexts must be based in the realities of students' lives.
13. Learning must be driven by critical, social justice goals, not neo-liberal economic policy
14. Young people need to see an authentic purpose for their learning
15. Racism is a given, inherent in our system and society. All education policy must be intentionally counter-hegemonic

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