Mai i te Maramatanga, ki te Putanga Mai o te Tahuritanga: From Conscientization to Transformation

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Introduction

Education is considered a crucial site of struggle for the redevelopment of Maori in the face of widespread high and disproportionate levels of socio-economic disadvantage. For the most part, such disadvantage has been both produced and reproduced within the social context by unequal power relations between dominant Pakeha (non-Maori, mainly European New Zealanders) and subordinated Maori. This paper reflects on innovative responses within Maori education in Aotearoa/New Zealand since the 1980s; in particular, it describes some of the critical circumstances that have led Maori to develop their own theorizing related to education. This particular indigenous theorizing has been labeled Kaupapa Maori theory (G. Smith, 1988; L. Smith, 1999).

It is important to understand the evolution of Kaupapa Maori theory within a process of praxis. Kaupapa Maori as an educational resistance strategy has grown out of an ongoing struggle that occurred within both Maori communities and Pakeha dominant institutional contexts. The notion of struggle is important in the overall development of Kaupapa Maori theory in that it connotes the thinking, commitment, and political conscientization of Maori with regard to the critical issues and understandings that needed to occur in order to make the theoretical components both robust and effective. This formative process of critical reflection and (re)development is very apparent within the research work of Maori scholars from the University of Auckland. More recently there has been a burgeoning of both literature and practical activity based on Kaupapa Maori theory from other University sites, Maori researchers, and community interest groups across New Zealand.

Before proceeding with this discussion on conscientization and transformative action within a Maori educational context, it must be clarified that the intent is not to uncritically export the Kaupapa Maori theory to other indigenous communities and contexts. One of the important principles argued around Kaupapa Maori theory is that the context in which it is being used is important; that is, theorizing needs to evolve from and interrelate with the specific cultural context within which it is to be applied. What may be useful for other indigenous communities and groups, however, are insights into the processes, experiences, and understandings related to Maori developing indigenous theorizing as an instrument for conscientization, resistance, and transformation.

A primary emphasis in this paper is placed on developing an understanding of the process of transformation itself. Thus in order for change to occur and to be effective, there is a need to know more precisely the key transformative elements within a given strategy. We ought to know more accurately (a) how and why communities buy in to a transformative process, (b) what counts as transformation, (c) how we know that transformation has actually taken place, and (d) whether or not the transformation is truly beneficial. Thus, the significant need here is to move beyond conscientization to change through transformative praxis.

The Maori Context

The Maori are a minority population within the very land of which they are the original inhabitants. They make up approximately 15% of a total New Zealand population of around four million. Despite efforts to resist the erosion of their knowledge, language, and culture, Maori have been significantly colonized and assimilated by the dominant Pakeha society. Within education, Maori continue to experience high and disproportionate levels of crises and disadvantage. For example in 1996, 42.6% of Maori males and 35.3% of Maori females left school with no formal qualifications. This is compared with 16.9% of non-Maori males and 12.2% of non-Maori females. Furthermore, since 1992, the gap in educational success between Maori and non-Maori has been widening.

1 At the 2002 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, the Indigenous Peoples of the Pacific Special Interest Group invited Graham Smith to present his research on the transformation of Maori education. This is his entire presentation.
The New Zealand context is made more interesting by the fact that in the 1980s the government launched headlong into neo-liberal economic reform. Many of these free market reforms were embedded within education structures and have arguably made Maori even more vulnerable to the colonizing imperatives within the education system. Although I do not wish to go into depth on this point, there is a strong correlation between the worsening statistics related to Maori performance in education and the insertion and impact of the neo-liberal education reforms. Some of the free-market reforms have proven to be extremely problematic for Maori and have been critically described as representing "new formations of colonization" (Smith, G. H. 1997). In this view, it is argued that the economic reforms have enhanced the intersection of economic exploitation and cultural oppression.

For those unfamiliar with New Zealand, the following list of demographic features will give a quick overview of the Maori situation:

- The New Zealand population is currently about 4 million people.
- Maori people make up 15% of the total New Zealand population.
- Maori were the first people to systematically inhabit the islands of New Zealand.
- It is popularly espoused that the first European explorers to "discover" New Zealand were Abel Tasman (1642) and James Cook (1769).
- The British began to settle in New Zealand around the 1800s.
- In 1840 the Treaty of Waitangi between the Crown of England and Maori tribes of New Zealand was signed and formally establish British colonial presence in New Zealand.
- Historically, Maori have been colonized and assimilated into European culture.
- The church and the education system have been significant agencies for cultural assimilation.
- Maori, as a group, have the worst crisis statistics in most social indices, including health, education, imprisonment, wealth, and the like.

The Economic Context

In coming to understand the rise of Maori political consciousness and critical developments in education, it is important to appreciate the economic context that stimulated both resistance and transformative action. In particular, it is necessary to understand the history of economic reform in New Zealand since the 1980s. This reform has been generalized as "neo-liberal" economic restructuring and is also referred to as free-market reform. This restructuring of the New Zealand economy is very significant as it marked a shift from a "welfare state" to a "free market" orientation. More ominously perhaps, New Zealand, once regarded as one of the leading examples of a successful welfare state economy, was moving to reposition itself as a champion of the neo-liberal approach. This economic redirection was aided by a number of factors. Firstly, New Zealand is a relatively small-scale economy; it is an island state and is consequently geographically isolated with clearly defined ocean borders. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, New Zealand had a new Labor (ostensibly socialist-oriented) government that was willing to implement the radical reforms necessary.

The Maori population of New Zealand provides a particularly interesting case study in which to observe and understand the development of a theoretically informed resistance to the new formations of colonization embedded in the neo-liberal restructuring of education. For example, a key strategy was the constructing of new hegemonies around the market notions such as "freedom of the individual," "consumer choice," "the autonomous chooser," "user pays," "increased competition," "accountability," "standards," "horizontal equity," "meritocracy," "co-opted democracy," and "economic management" (rather than economic policy). The implicit values embedded within this form of restructuring did not simply reinforce and support dominant Pakeha values, behaviors, and thinking. They went further—they provided impetus to marginalize, demean, derogate, and subjugate Maori people and their cultural preferences. Thus, Maori cultural values, which emphasize collective responsibility (rather than individual), choice, rights, ownership, wealth, and economics were constructed as the "other," "oppositional," and "contradictory." Elsewhere it has been argued that this culturally captured form of economics, with its emphasis on processes of commodification and privatization, can be interpreted as new formations of colonization (Smith, 1997).
The Rise of Alternative Forms of Maori Education

The indigenous population of New Zealand has developed some innovative educational intervention strategies following the implementation of its pre-school immersion model (Te Kohanga Reo) in 1982. The growth of the Maori education resistance initiatives since the 1980s represents a revolution within Maori education. These resistance initiatives respond to the new economic formations of colonization in that they are counter-hegemonic and are responsive to the commodification impetus of the neo-liberal economic context.

The essence of the revolution of 1982 is summarized in the following comments:

- In the 1980s, Maori took more control over the key decision-making and organization of their own education through various alternative education initiatives.
- During this time, Maori, themselves, became increasingly proactive in taking action against educational and language crises.
- These actions resulted in increased numbers of Maori becoming politically conscientized and involved in political action.
- Maori developed a vision and plan of action related to language recovery and revitalization that resulted in significant support from large sections of the Maori community.
- During the struggle for Maori language revitalization many Maori developed critique and critical analysis of the shortcomings of the existing system, and the prevailing social context maintained by dominant Pakeha power relations.
- Maori individuals and groups developed a theoretical dimension to the struggle to reclaim language and schooling, called “Kaupapa Maori.”
- This reclamation led to many Maori going outside of the existing schooling structures to have their educational needs met.
- This search for alternative schooling caused a legitimacy crisis for state schooling that eventually led to a “settlement,” with the state incorporating and funding the new Maori schools.
- There are now more than seventy state funded Kura Kaupapa Maori primary schools in New Zealand that teach through the medium of Maori language.
- The Kaupapa Maori methodology and theory is now being used to bring about changes for Maori in other sectors.

Since the 1982, Maori have been engaged in a number of educational interventions that attempt, firstly, to revitalize Maori language, knowledge, and culture; and secondly, to overcome a number of social crises related to educational underachievement. As a consequence of the negative, mono-cultural experiences endured by many Maori in and through schooling, Maori communities have developed a series of Maori immersion schooling initiatives. These have been implemented at the pre-school (Te Kohanga Reo), the primary school (Kura Kaupapa Maori), the secondary school (Te Kura Tuarua) and the tertiary levels (Waananga) in an attempt to respond to the twin concerns outlined above. These resistance initiatives grew out of many years of struggle and frustration as increased numbers of Maori withdrew from the mainstream, state schooling options. These initiatives were heavily politicized and often became embroiled in charges from disaffected Pakeha as being “separatist” and “cultural retrenchment” movements. A major development at this time was that Maori communities formed a substantial critique (in that they became politically conscientized) of the continued failure of the existing system, despite, ostensibly well-intended policy reform over the years, to change these negative outcomes for Maori. Furthermore, Maori parents became increasingly conscientized about some of the structural impediments to their education aspirations. That is, they began to penetrate the hegemonies that held dominant, Pakeha state education in place. For example, Maori critically engaged the government over such issues as control of funding and resources, manipulation of democratic processes, and mono-cultural management and administrative structures. In this process of engagement, Maori parents became more critically aware of some of the structural barriers and constraints that underpinned the system’s inability and reluctance to deliver on their aspirations. These critical penetrations of prevailing hegemony gave impetus to education resistance...
initiatives taken up by Maori. Paulo Freire's (1970) notion that “the oppressed must also free themselves and that the oppressor alone can not free the oppressed” has meaning here. My doctoral dissertation research on Kaupapa Maori theory and practice analyzes and discusses some of the fundamental intervention elements that are embedded across all of these Maori resistance initiatives (Smith, 1997).

Thus the new formations of colonization that are forged at the interface of cultural oppression and economic exploitation required new resistance strategies. In this sense the real revolution of the 1980s was not so much the language revitalization programs (although these are important in their own right), but the revolution in Maori critical thinking and the realization by Maori that they could make change themselves. This has been generally referred to as the “Kaupapa Maori Revolution,” but more recently (in recognition of its powerful ability to mobilize Maori community resistance and to develop transformation) it has been more definitively described as “Kaupapa Maori theory” and “Transformative praxis.”

Kaupapa Maori Theory

In this next section, I examine the set of transformative elements that are common to Maori alternative education initiatives, from pre-school (Te Kohanga Reo) to tertiary institutions (Waananga), identifying them as a core set of change factors. It is hoped that in identifying these common intervention elements that we are then able to make some informed generalizations about developing successful transformative action that has the potential to be applied in other societal contexts and indigenous situations.

One of the critical elements that ought to be understood relates to the renewed commitment of Maori adults and parents to realizing the potential of education. This shift in attitude towards schooling is a major turn around for many Maori who endured considerable suffering during their own personal experiences in the dominant state schooling system. Gradually, the misgivings, fears, and resistance of Maori towards education have been replaced by an understanding that education can be changed to serve their needs.

The following six principles are considered to be the crucial change factors in Kaupapa Maori praxis².

- **The principle of self-determination or relative autonomy**
  The perceived need by Maori to have increased control over their own lives and cultural well-being has made gains within the kaupapa of Maori schools given that they have been organized by Maori decision-makers, many of whom are teachers. Greater autonomy over key decision-making in schooling has been attained in areas such as administration, curriculum, pedagogy, and Maori cultural aspirations. Because Maori people have assumed leadership roles in education, they have made choices and decisions that reflect their cultural, political, economic, and social preferences. Furthermore, when Maori make decisions for themselves, the commitment by Maori participants to making the ideas work is more certain and solid.

- **The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity**
  In Kura Kaupapa Maori, “to be Maori” is taken for granted, so there is little need to justify one’s identity, as is the case in most mainstream educational settings. In Kaupapa Maori educational settings, Maori language, knowledge, culture, and values are validated and legitimated—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 distinctive cultural identity. By incorporating these elements, a strong emotional and spiritual factor is introduced to Kaupapa Maori settings, which gains the support and commitment of Maori. In particular, many Maori adults are now convinced that schooling—that is, Kaupapa Maori schooling, has relevance.

- **The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy**
  Kaupapa Maori teaching and learning settings and pra-
tices closely and effectively connect with the cultural backgrounds and life circumstances of Maori communities—that is, teaching and learning choices are selected as being culturally preferred. But the movement is also inclusive in that other pedagogy are also utilised, including those borrowed from general Pakeha schooling methods and from other Pacific/Asian cultures. The latter is a logical development given close cultural similarities, and given the shared commonalties of the Austronesian group of languages.

The principle of mediating socio-economic and home difficulties
Through its ngakau (emotional) and wairua (spiritual) elements, the kaupapa (philosophy) of Kura Kaupapa Maori is such a powerful and all-embracing force, that it commits Maori communities to take the schooling enterprise seriously. It not only impacts schooling at the ideological level, and assists 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.

The principle of incorporating cultural structures which emphasize the collective rather than the individual
The extended family structure underscores the relationship between social factors and Maori family life. This collective provides a 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 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 who have reinvested in education for their children.

The principle of a shared and collective vision/philosophy
Kura Kaupapa Maori schooling has a collective vision, which is written into a formal charter entitled Te Aho Matua. This vision provides the guidelines for excellence in Maori education. 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—political, social, economic, and cultural.

Lessons in Transformative Praxis
Underpinning the Maori intervention elements 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. The Kaupapa Maori educational interventions represent the evolving of a more sophisticated response by Maori to freeing themselves from these multiple forms of oppression and exploitation. The very emergence of Kaupapa Maori as an intervention strategy reconstitutes the Western dominant resistance notions of conscientization, resistance, and transformative praxis. In particular, Maori cultural ideology 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 to, or contingent on, the other states. Thus the popular representation of transformative action shown in Figure 1 (based on a predominantly Western type of thinking) needs to be critically engaged.
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; and all stand in equal relation to each other. This representation might best be understood as a cycle.

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 (e.g., taking their children to Kohanga Reo), and this has led to conscientization and participation in resistance. This is a significant critique of much of the writing on these concepts that tend to portray a lineal progression 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.

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 structural concerns (i.e., economic, ideological, and power structures) as well as cultural concerns, in particular, those related to agency. Some of the important factors with which Maori resistance initiatives attempt to engage relate to economic, ideological, and power dimensions that are derived from a nexus of state, dominant, Pakeha cultural interests.

Where indigenous peoples are in educational crises, indigenous educators must be trained to be change agents whose primary task is the transformation of undesirable circumstances. They must develop radical pedagogy that is informed by their cultural preferences and by their own critical circumstances. They must be taught about the importance of reflecting on and questioning their work: What, for example, is transformative practice? How can it be achieved? Do indigenous people's needs and aspirations require different schooling approaches? Who benefits? Such critical questions must not only lie at the heart of indigenous teacher education approaches, they must ensure "buy in" from the communities that are purported to be serve.

### The Real Revolution of the 1980s

The revolution of Maori education in the 1980s was not simply about an innovative educational approach towards language revitalization and intervention in educational underachievement. The revolution was also about the development of new transformative strategies that developed both culturalist and structuralist emphases. It was also about

- Maori being proactive in transforming education, that is, not waiting for Pakeha to make the changes, but doing it themselves.
- Maori developing critical theory on how knowledge is socially constructed within educational settings, and formulating approaches to transformative action.
- Maori developing critical theory on economic conditions, including scientific/technical rationality, and formulating approaches to transformative action.
- Maori coming to understandings about critical theories
of education; about their social construction, and about their usefulness when applied by Maori in their own interests.

- Maori recognizing the need to undo Pakeha hegemony and to decolonize themselves.
- Maori understanding that given multiple sites of oppression, there must also be multiple sites of struggle and multiple strategies for change. In short, complex colonization requires complex responses (c.f. Gramsci’s notion of war of position in Hoare, Q. & Nowell-Smith, G., 1971 as discussed by Smith, 1997).

Finally, my paper attempts to move beyond critical analysis to transformative praxis. It is argued that indigenous peoples need to more fully understand how change is developed and actually achieved. There is a need to move beyond mere description of problems and issues to making sure that change does in fact occur. The status quo for most Maori is problematic and there is an urgent need for change. In the words of Tuki Nepe (personal communication, 1988):

We are paddling our own canoe and we are heading in this direction [alternative schooling]. You [Ministry of Education officials] can either get on board and come with us or you can stay here and drown. We are going to go anyway—with or without you!

This shift in focus beyond political consciousness-raising to actually taking transformative action is encapsulated in the Nepe’s quote and is the essence of the revolution which has occurred in New Zealand since the 1980s. It has been this movement beyond the ideology and rhetoric of resistance that is an important and critical learning, not just for Maori, but also for other indigenous groups.

References

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