

Pakeha culture reigns totally unchallenged

The indifference and antagonism of many pakeha teachers often frustrated maori teachers' efforts to run effective maoritanga programmes in schools, a former teacher has claimed.

A former school-teacher and now part-time lecturer Judith Simon made these claims in a discussion paper she prepared for the Maori education development conference at Ngaruawahia's Turangawaewae marae in March. Ms Simon wrote a master's thesis on maori education matters.

"These (pakeha) teachers not only fail to reinforce the maori teachers' efforts, but in some cases openly reveal negative views of maoritanga to their pupils," she wrote.

She described many teachers' attitudes towards their maori pupils as "deficit" views, whereby their believed maori children were limited in language and experience, which in turn limited their learning ability.

Ms Simon attacked attitudes towards maori children which she said continued to make them feel inferior, and continued to reinforce the dominance of pakeha culture and interests.

She said the education system was structured around pakeha interests and pakeha-determined goals. Any inroads into that system by maori interests "must be seen as a threat by those intent on maintaining pakeha dominance."

For example, she said the "deficit" policy of the 1960s saw maori children as "problems" for education, while hiding the bias in favour of pakeha dominance.

Efforts to correct that injustice by asserting that maori children should be seen as "culturally different" did little to change things. The term "soon" became a catch-phrase eagerly taken up by teachers in making spurious claims that maori educational needs were being recognised and catered for.

It thus served to conceal the continuation of the "deficit" attitude, and under such a system, maoritanga could never be more than "a mere appendage" to the school curriculum.

That only served to reinforce the belief that the pakeha-orientated curriculum was the "real" curriculum, she wrote.



The National Advisory Committee on Maori Education in 1970 came up with a policy which said maoritanga and maori language should be integral parts of the school curriculum. This was to enhance maori children's self-image and thereby equip them to realise their full potential.

It would also serve to develop in pakeha children an awareness of maori cultural values.

But by the 1980s, Ms Simon said she found most principals and teachers were still operating on the "deficit" idea.

"Besides providing teachers with a built-in excuse for ineffectual teaching, the perpetuation of these negative stereotyped views of maori children disadvantage maori pupils further by inevitably producing low teacher expectations that become self-fulfilling prophecies," she wrote.

In such schools, she said a patronising view of maoritanga was communicated to the pupils. Where maoritanga was made a "club" option competing with other activities, pupils got the message that it was neither significant nor important in education.

Such ways of catering for maori pupils tended to have the opposite effect of the intended enhancing of their

self-image, and reinforced feelings of pakeha superiority in pakeha pupils, she said.

As a result some maori teachers were reluctant to have maoritanga officially included in the school curriculum. They recognised that to focus on maori cultural heritage, and then treat it with contempt, was a "greater act of violence" than failing to acknowledge it at all.

Ms Simon also attacked the principle that teachers should not treat their maori and pakeha pupils any differently on the grounds that "we are all New Zealanders", or "they are all children to me".

Such views often accompanied the view that a special catering to maori pupils was "separatism", but in Ms Simon's view they were responses to a threat to pakeha dominance. Such rationales merely served to allow pakeha culture to reign "totally unchallenged".

Another excuse offered by schools was that they did not have time to incorporate maoritanga programmes.

"This view denigrates maoris and their culture by implying that maoritanga is less significant and less 'real' than pakeha culture," Ms Simons wrote.