

learn", his/her "attention span is short", and some unfortunately displayed quite racist views, implying that minority ethnic groups in New Zealand "seem to be less intelligent", as shown by their "low scores on intelligence and other scholastic tests". All these rationalizations conveniently exonerated the educational system, the school and teachers from any blame for the mass failure that occurs despite the extensive research and literature available that repudiates such views. Although teachers express concern for low-achieving Maori children the great majority of them seem to have an irreversible mental set that the "problem" is not of the school's making, and that the school does its best to overcome the "problem". Many schools introduced Maoritanga (Maori cultural arts) and Taha Maori (Maori dimension) hoping to improve self-esteem and raise levels of achievement, but unless this is done with sensitivity and sincerity there is a distinct possibility that Maori parents may interpret the move as patronising tokenism by well intentioned monocultural pakehas.

A Maori five-year old new entrant enters a rather frightening new world when he/she is ushered into the hurly burly of his/her first classroom. The majority of teachers are middle class and monocultural, know little of "things Maori" consider pakeha culture to be superior to Maori culture, speak only English and do not consider the Maori language to be very important. Many have low expectations for Maori pupils and hold "deficit" views of Maori children's competence in the English language, intelligence and home environment.

#### System euro-centric in origin

The majority of policy statements emanating from the Department of Education describe the Maoris as an educational "problem" and it is little wonder when the system is totally defined by pakeha objectives, pakeha controlled, pakeha administered and essentially euro-centre in origin. The much vaunted ideological objective of "equality of educational opportunity" is a hollow myth in a system so obviously favouring middle-class pakeha children. During the last two decades the traditional curriculum has grudgingly incorporated some elements of Maoritanga or taha Maori but these have never become policy, and simply remain as "optional extras" to be included in the school programme at the whim of the principal. As an inspector I was never expected nor encouraged to promote either Maoritanga or taha

Maori, and Advisers in Maori education operate in schools by invitation only. Similarly the itinerant teachers of Maori are permitted to work in schools by grace and favour of the principal, and some schools flatly refuse to allow any Maori culture to be included in the school programme.

The Education Department demands compliant docility from its departmental officers, and comes down very heavily on any subordinate brave or foolish enough to criticize policy, yet it seems quite callous and insensitive to the mass failure of Maori children, and in this regard gives little direct leadership to the schools. When external pressure becomes sufficiently strong it shifts ground reluctantly and minimises (with "delicate phrases") and the extent to which the status quo is disturbed. The Kohanga Reo movement is a good example of the departmental monolith being prodded by impatient Maori mothers who had become exasperated by its detachment and indifference. Provoked into reacting, the department is at last training eleven teachers in Maori language and culture for one year at Hamilton Teachers College. This is little comfort to the parents of thousands of Kohanga Reo children who after becoming quite proficient in the Maori language and culture, are entering the state schools where the prevailing milieu is mono-linguistic, mono-cultural in the European tradition, and minimally sensitised to react sympathetically to the needs of Maori children. It is any wonder many frustrated Maori parents are threatening to establish alternative schooling? Is it any wonder the Waitangi Tribunal is sceptical of the Department's record as regards the mass failure of Maori children. In its latest report to the Minister of Maori Affairs (June 1986) it states:

"It (the Department's record) is a dismal failure and no amount of delicate phrasing can mask that fact . . . How can it be that the Department's philosophy and practice in educating children accords so closely with the aspirations and desires of the Maori people as described to us, and yet the results of its application be the object of such trenchant and bitter criticism" (p43).

#### A time-bomb ranked society

*T. K. Royal, a former departmental officer, speaking on the Orongomai Marae said: "The present education system is a time bomb — a ranked society perpetuating a ranked society, a racist reality. The system is the greatest cause of our social disharmony because it labels people as failures" Tu Tangata 27/12/85.*

During the seventeen years with the Education Department I became increasingly disillusioned with any employing authority as a rigidly hierarchical, authoritarian bureaucracy more concerned with its own power structures than children, and concealing its inadequate policies with an emanation of statements couched in "delicate phrasing". There is an urgent need for a complete philosophical purification and structural remodelling of the department if we are to see an end to the injustices being done to Maori children by the system. The present Minister of Education suggests that change within the system is necessary when he stated publicly:

*" . . . No one in their right mind says Maori students are less intelligent than pakehas. There is obviously something wrong with the system — the structure is wrong. . . "*

*Evening Post, 2 Oct 1985*

## How failure begins in the classroom

**A**t one state in my teaching I foolishly blamed the secondary schools for the child's failure, believing that their culling, sorting, and labelling together with an inflexible public examination system caused the low achieving student to leave school at fifteen. Each December I anxiously consigned by Form II pupils to that 'heartless institution' down the road — the local secondary school. However,

as an inspector, observing in hundreds of classrooms, I am convinced that a child's failure begins on the very day she/he is enrolled. Many a caring infant teacher will no doubt feel outraged by that remark, but a cursory search of the available literature will confirm my contention. (See writings by: Jane and J. Ritchie, R. A. Benton, J. M. Barrington, R. J. Walker, Judith Simon, B. Gadd, Joan Metger, Alison & R. St.