

School certificate: A burden we pay to bear

In Britain they have had a system which decides at the age of 11 which pupils shall go to schools that can prepare them for university and securely well paid jobs, and who shall not. 80% of the candidates were sent to the non-university preparing schools. And the working class children overwhelmingly were selected by the 11 plus exams for those schools. We have a similar system in this country — it's called School Certificate.

I don't remember anything in the Maori magazines on this topic, but it's high time there was. School Certificate is a burden adding to our current problems that the Maori and Polynesian peoples should not have to bear.

We all know that Maori children are as clever or dull, as good or bad as many other children. We all know that most Maori children speak mainly English and that everyone of them can communicate well in English. We all know that Maoris have contributed unpredictably high numbers of New Zealand's creative thinkers. But the School Certificate examinations carry on as if none of these things were true.

And yet to get into the sixth form, the student needs School Certificate passes. To get into the State Service the applicant requires School Certificate passes. To get into teachers college and into many of the technical institute courses, the student needs sixth form certificate — which the school has to base on the School Certificate examination results for the school in the previous year.

Last year 69% of the Maori candidates for School Certificate failed the examination papers they sat. 57% of the non-Maori candidates passed the papers they sat. Altogether, the 1982 results make frightening reading. In the subjects that thousands of Maori candidates sat the failure rates ran like this: in Geography it was 74%, in English 73%, in Science 66%, in Maths 64%. Among the non-Maori candidates the greatest failure in those subjects was only 46% in English.

Even if you thought our schools were preparing young Maoris for practical careers in gardening or in workshops, or that our schools were qualifying our youngsters for home duties, you were wrong. Those subjects provided the greatest Maori failure rates of all: in clothing 88% of the Maori entrants failed, in Horticulture 86%, in Agriculture 84%, in Home economics 84%. Even in Maori the non-Maori candidates pass rate beat that of Maori youngsters by three per cent!

It is the same story of failure that we sometimes used to read about in the 1970s. But why? How could it be in a system we keep getting told is fair? (All the figures, by the way, come from the Minister of Education himself.)

There are two main reasons. The first is that the School Certificate exam papers are set as if everyone belonged to a conventional Pakeha family, one or more wage earners, your own house and section, the family celebrating its birthdays, going off on holidays, buying expensive household equipment, reading magazines like the 'Listener', and spending its time chatting about these things and the experiences to do with this way of life.

Hardly any of the exam papers even mention anything to do with Maoris or Polynesians. And if they do, it's just as likely to ask the candidates to do strange things, such as when an English exam asked children to write a story as if it was a radio commentary on a tangi. Sometimes there's the chance in English or History exams to write sensibly on Maori matters or Maori people. But most exams just ignore Maoris and Polynesians and their lives as if they didn't exist.

The second cause of Maoris being failed in these exams is in the way that very complicated things, such as how much fifth form Geography does a student know, how good she is at explaining what she knows on paper, how good was her teacher at guessing what was going to be tested in the exam paper, are summed up in a per cent mark.

And then all the marks for the popular subjects are fed into a computer and come out forced into a normal curve of distribution — which simply means that if anybody's way of thinking or of expressing themselves or what they know or have experienced is a bit different from the conventional, then they're the ones picked out to be failed. After all, the exams work like the British 11+, to pick out which children to exclude from further education or from the best kinds of jobs.

Because Maoritanga is very much

Examiner's Code No. Candidate's Code No.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION - NEW ZEALAND

SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 1981

MAORI

PAPER B

(11 marks)

Time allowed: One hour

All questions must be attempted

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	MARKS
QUESTION 1: READING COMPREHENSION	1
QUESTION 2: GUIDED COMPOSITION	2
TOTAL PAPER B	

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

1. All answers are to be done in this booklet.

2. PLEASE HAND THIS BOOKLET IN TO THE SUPERVISOR BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE EXAMINATION ROOM.

(Time over)

alive and kicking, and because children may be brought up a little differently from many Pakeha, and because lots of Maori families talk more about the family and its obligations than about the latest flash gadgets on sale in the stores, Maori children are the ones the examinations' marking system so often picks out as different — and therefore to be failed.

It's not the children, you see, who are dull or lazy or poor learners, but it is the system and the way it is worked that rejects Maoris and Polynesians. And, of course, Maori taxpayers are financing all this.

What can be done? Secondary teachers aren't very happy with the system for a variety of reasons. Some schools have systems working to assess fifth formers that operate alongside the School Certificate system. And the exams themselves could probably be improved if only the School Certificate Board would let a few Maoris have a go at improving it.

Maybe the whole system should be thrown out and further education and jobs opened up to anyone who can actually do them. If the system was a motorcar it would be in a museum — it's been around since right after the last world war.

But whatever is done, something needs to be done soon. School Certificate sends more and more of our Maori youngsters straight from school to the dole. Must it be a burden we pay to bear?

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