

rate of Maori children in our schools. The principal weapon suggested to combat this failure is the development of personal competence and a sense of worth in Maori children with particular emphasis on cultural identity. It is argued that with their identity secure Maori children will cope with whatever challenges or problems that are strewn in their path. It seems to be becoming the great 'cure-all'. How do you see it?

TAPSELL: I would place cultural identity first in priority by far. I believe that if the education system fails Maori children in any way it fails us most in that it does little in substantial terms to develop any sense of identity, any sense of belonging. They have no identity in terms of place, in terms of history. They have no sense that the new world has a place for them as Maori, that they will be welcome in it and that others will appreciate their contribution.

O'REGAN: Many pakeha teachers, though, would agree with you. That is just what they are striving for with their Maori pupils — but the kids just don't respond or, if they do, its only in the nice warm Maori thing and not in those areas which count in terms of qualifications. Can schools really offer our people anything much in the way of faith in themselves?

TAPSELL: I believe that there are some very fine teachers out there trying very hard but I believe that it is the system, the curriculum that needs quite drastic change. I think that first of all we need a much greater emphasis on things Maori. I believe that we should introduce into our schools a subject which I have called New Zealand Studies. Its prime aim would be to inform the sense of identity of all children — but it's Maori that I am concerned with here. That subject ought to contain history, geography some Maori Language, arts and crafts and so on. The education system should allow for it to be centrifugally based — let me explain that. Take a child in school at, say, Otaki, he ought to have a very thorough knowledge of all of the areas around his own school — every mountain, every stream every hill. He ought to know the names and what they mean. He ought to know of the people who lived in that area before the coming of the Pakeha and after. He ought to know of the stresses and the strains which brought people there and which drove them away — he should know these things very thoroughly indeed. And then, less thoroughly, a hundred miles out from Otaki, less thoroughly Auckland the South Island, less thoroughly the Pacific Islands, less thoroughly again America and Japan and — least thoroughly of all — Europe. I accept that whilst we have a majority of Pakeha people who descend from Europe there is some reason to pay at-

tention to it but I believe that the modern world demands that our education should be centrifugally based.

O'REGAN: A comment on your geography — there's a fair chunk of the South Island within a 100 miles radius of Otaki! However, without debating the structure of your approach, you essentially see the solution to the cultural identity needs in terms of what is taught ie. the content?

TAPSELL: Yes. However I am assuming that the climate of the school is sound, that there are good attitudes, positive attitudes, between Maori and Pakeha and competent teachers with good attitudes. That goes without saying.

O'REGAN: What is your response when I tell you that what you suggest is, in very large measure, the current diet of many of our schools?

TAPSELL: I'd like to think that is so — but I have seen little evidence of it.

O'REGAN: You are really suggesting a drastic revision of the Social Studies syllabus — some would say a revolution!

TAPSELL: Yes.

O'REGAN: What connection do you see between the development of cultural identity in the child, this sense of self esteem, and for example the psychological well being of Maori people?

TAPSELL: It is central to it. I use the term Health in the WHO sense — complete mental, physical and spiritual well-being. Without spiritual and mental well-being there is no health. Basic to that is a sense of self-esteem. In a young person that self-esteem derives from the family, from the group — in the Maori case from the hapu and the tribe. I believe that a defect in our present situation is the failure to give Maori children any firm belief that their contribution and that of their fathers and mothers and their forefathers before them is worthy of consideration and something to be proud of. If Maori children could feel that the contribution of their forefathers to the country was of great importance to the development of our society as it was and as it is, then I am sure they would develop a sense of pride. That pride would lead to greater scholastic effort, to greater attention to even the simplest things like dress, like stance, like nutrition — everything. The young person with a sense of pride, of identity, with the feeling that he represents a contribution to our world that is respected; — that's the person who is bright, who is alert, who stands upright, who polishes his shoes and feels part of the scene. The child who has been made to feel in a hundred different ways that his contribution and that of his people are barely worth considering — he is down at heel, he can't be bothered with his dress, he is not alert — he fails.

Most teachers would probably readi-

ly agree with the principle here, the difference would be on how to achieve it.

O'REGAN: Maori Language in the schools. How do you see it?

TAPSELL: I believe that it would be impractical to have full Maori Language as a compulsory subject although I personally believe that it would be a good thing. I believe, though, that an initial level would be an essential component of the programme of New Zealand Studies I spoke of earlier.

It is slowly being recognised that learning Maori and having some competence in things Maori is really worth doing. I don't know a single Pakeha who has learned to speak Maori who won't tell you that it's most interesting and exciting thing he has done. I think that's important.

O'REGAN: A couple of years ago Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan introduced a Bill requiring all schools to provide Maori when it was requested; that it should be an option available to every New Zealander. Is that in conflict with your New Zealand Studies core subject notion?

TAPSELL: Not at all. The two are complementary. I believe that both should have a syllabus so it is not subject to the whim or judgement of School Principals as to its introduction.

There is another point about Maori Language. Many ask 'What's the point of Maori Language? It is not of any use in the real world of business and making a living.' I wouldn't teach it for that. That would be the last reason I could imagine for learning Maori. I would teach it to support that sense of identity — to give New Zealand children, no matter what their forebears, a sense of identity with New Zealand through its indigenous language.

O'REGAN: There is clearly much that the school can do to promote this sense of identity, this confident competence, this self esteem in young Maori. It might even take a lead in promoting it within its community but what can the school really do in the face of the social and economic condition of the great mass of the Maori population? With more than 85 per cent of the Maori school population in urban schools, separated from its cultural roots, featuring the worst statistics going for prisons, marriage breakdown, health and employment and so on — do you really believe that the school can effectively combat the absence of hope, of expectation that so many of our kids are bringing to school with them? Significant numbers come from environments which don't perceive achievement even as a possibility. Do you seriously believe that adjustment of the curriculum can do much for Maori identity against this tide of failure?

TAPSELL: Yes. First, it can offer an element in the school to which Maori children can perhaps relate more