



E kore au e ngaro he kākano i ruia mai i Rangiātea: Literacy policy for the survival of Māori as a people

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Abstract

Literacy holds very little positive meaning or experience for Māori and indigenous peoples. It has, instead, played a significant role in the breakdown of rich and cherished ancestral ways of life. This has resulted in a general, intergenerational resistance to literacy participation among adult Māori.

Research findings reveal the nexus between literacy, colonialism and imperialism. This critical link is the key determinant of significantly high levels of adult Māori dis-engagement with literacy. Yet, research has also found that adult Māori willingly engage with literacy when it is grounded within a fundamental aspiration of indigenous peoples: to live our ancestral heritage and pass it on to future generations in its full richness and vitality.

These insights challenge the neo-liberal values that dominate international and national adult literacy policy. Māori and indigenous peoples' resistance to literacy participation is not an outright rejection of literacy. They seek, instead, to engage in literacy practice in self-determining ways that restore and strengthen, rather than deny, their ancestral heritage within day-to-day whānau life. Incorporating this aspiration into tertiary literacy policy would shift it away from a position of entrenched neo-colonialism, towards truly post-colonial approaches that promote pluralistic, mutually respectful relationships with Māori and indigenous peoples.

Keywords

Adult literacy; Māori; indigenous peoples

Introduction

Two fundamental recurring themes emerge when literacy policy is examined from a Māori [indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand] and indigenous standpoint. On one hand, literacy policy has and continues to function as a tool of dispossession, assimilation and colonialism. On the other, Māori and indigenous peoples have consistently asserted that policy should support literacy to function as a tool for recovery, regeneration and self-determination.

In this article, I explore these fundamental recurring themes by describing the literacy experiences and aspirations of Māori and indigenous peoples within historic and contemporary contexts. These experiences are explored in closer detail by examining the findings of an adult literacy study



undertaken within my own iwi [ancestral kin group], Whanganui iwi; as well as the efforts of the Confederation of Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Toa Rangatira to achieve their literacy aspirations at Te Wānanga o Raukawa. I describe these efforts as a pūkenga (researcher) of Te Wānanga o Raukawa.

I argue that these two fundamental recurring themes are, in fact, competing agendas that determine Māori and indigenous engagement, or disengagement, with literacy. They also determine our survival, or extinction, as distinct peoples. Arguably, the monolingual and monocultural nature of tertiary literacy policy is aligned to Māori disengagement with literacy; and to our extinction, rather than our survival, as a people.

Māori, indigenous peoples and literacy

Historical aspirations

Prior to contact with Pākehā [people or person of European descent], Māori and indigenous peoples had developed complex and sophisticated ancestral literacies and literacy practices. The predominant ‘text’ at that time was the natural dynamics of their ancestral homelands, and being able to ‘read’ the people and the land was a part of everyday life. Specialised ancestral knowledge of the people and the land was accumulated over generations and constantly developed, refined and transmitted from generation to generation. Ancestral literacy practices maintained this body of knowledge in everything that the people saw, heard, felt and sensed (Antone, 2003; T. Smith, 1999).

Māori literacies and literacy practices have been described as including the capacity to read the spiritual, cultural and natural values of one’s ancestral homelands and name significant features such as ancestral mountains, rivers, other wāhi tūpuna [ancestral sites of significance] and wāhi tapu [sacred ancestral sites]. It includes the ability to read ancestral literature such as the different types of whakairo [ancestral carvings], tukutuku [ancestral weavings] and kowhaiwhai [ancestral weavings], and their place in the marae ātea [area in front of the whareniui where certain ancestral protocols are observed] and whareniui [ancestral communal house]. It also extends to reading body language as an expression of ancestral values (Māori Adult Literacy Working Party, 2001, p. 7).

Underpinning ancestral literacies is a distinctive discourse based on whakapapa, a complex set of interconnected relationships that are linked by creation genealogies, and located in entirely different notions of time and space from Western lineal understandings. In its broadest sense, for Māori and indigenous peoples, being ‘literate’ is about sustaining their ancestral worldviews in order to perpetuate themselves as distinct peoples. This is achieved by living and perpetuating in their everyday lives te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga: their ancestral languages, culture and knowledge systems (Jackson, 1992).

Contact with Pākehā created the opportunity to synergise ancestral literacy practices with new forms of literacy. Written and print literacy were introduced to Aotearoa [indigenous name for New Zealand, literally meaning ‘the long white cloud’] in the early 1800s and Māori engaged quickly and enthusiastically with this new literacy practice. This was a rich period for Māori written literature, with a wealth of local, regional and national material produced at this time. This body of literature includes manuscripts, letters, petitions, submissions, newspapers and other published material that require a sound knowledge of ancestral literacies to be able to comprehend the complex subject matter (Cleave, 1983).

Much of this material is still held by whānau [extended family] and hapū [a kin group of whānau], and within archive collections. Early material was written in te reo [Māori language], but spoken and written bilingualism in te reo and te reo Pākehā [English language] also began to develop at this time. The book *Rere atu taku manu!* by Curnow, Hopa and McRae (2002) brings together 12 essays on the Māori newspapers published at this time. The introduction describes these newspapers as documenting:

an engaging and revealing report of the everyday life of Māori ... notably the constant effort that Māori made to resist assimilation and ... retain their very *Māoritanga* or Māoriness. The voices of the ancestors combine in print with modern Māori literary

style. ... Confirming the very evident power that the press brings, the newspapers reveal not only a Māori world view, but also a belief in the importance of print to educate, inform, reform and entertain. (p. 4)

Historical experiences

By the early 1800s, Māori were engaged with written and print literacy at remarkably high levels. In fact, hapū had developed their own methods of literacy instruction, and had adapted reading and writing to their ancestral value and knowledge systems alongside ancestral literacy practices. This initial period of rich activity was soon to change dramatically with the advent of the New Zealand state education system, which was implemented by the Education Ordinance 1847 and the Native Schools Acts 1858 and 1867. The clear objective of literacy policy for Māori was the extinction of *te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga* [ancestral language, culture and knowledge systems]. Literacy policy firmly advanced an agenda of colonialism and assimilation (Parr, 1963).

From 1847, missionary schools were supported by the state to provide religious instruction, manual labour training and literacy instruction to Māori children. These schools were not well supported by Māori, partly because separating children from their ancestral community was considered to be repugnant by Māori, and also because of the harsh discipline and manual labour which was described as being “akin to slavery” (Parr, 1963, p. 213). In 1867, the state established the Native Schools system and, from 1894, attendance by Māori children was compulsory.

Native Schools institutionalised strictly monolingual and monocultural literacy practice, and teachers physically punished Māori children for speaking *te reo*. The stated purpose of education policy was to assimilate and ‘civilise’ Māori. A school inspector, Hugh Carleton, asserted that “things had now come to pass that it was necessary either to exterminate the Natives or to civilise them” (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, p. 6). He also stated that schools were “aiming at a double object, the civilisation of the race and the quietening of the country” (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, p. 5).

The Department of Education also restricted the Native Schools curriculum to manual labour subjects. In the 1880s, the headmaster of Te Aute College, John Thornton, subverted this curriculum by tutoring his students for matriculation. This produced the first wave of Māori university graduates in the 1890s, including Apirana Ngata, Te Rangihīroa Peter Buck, Māui Pōmare, Tūtere Wīrepa and others. In response, the Crown set up a Commission of Inquiry into Te Aute College, which put pressure on Thornton to abandon the school’s academic curriculum. When Thornton refused, the Department of Education curtailed its financial scholarships to the College (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999).

Some years later, Thornton’s successor capitulated to the Department’s demands and removed the academic curriculum. The Commission’s report served to reaffirm a school curriculum for Māori based on manual labour and domestic training. In his report, the Inspector General of Education, George Hobden, claimed that this was necessary to make Māori recognise “the dignity of manual labour” (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, p. 7).

In the 1930s, Apirana Ngata questioned the limited Native Schools curriculum. As a result, the Department of Education permitted the following token elements of Māori culture to be included in the curriculum: ‘myths and legends’, arts, crafts and music. However, literacy policy continued to be strictly monolingual and focus on assimilation into the 1950s, and then ‘integration’ in the 1960s (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999).

From first contact with Pākehā up until the mid-1800s, *te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga* and the ability of Māori to exercise agency over their own lives remained intact, indeed, they continued to develop and grow. Māori society thrived at this time. For example, Māori engagement with the written word was remarkably high, with a wealth of written and print literature produced at this time (Curnow et al., 2002; Haami, 2004). State education policy sought to abolish this activity (Soler, 2000).

A similar example of state policy to undermine Māori agency is its intervention in the thriving regional and national Māori trade in fishing, which had expanded into international trade at this time (Waitangi Tribunal, 1988). This industry was well established by the 1820s and continued up until the late 1860s, when the state passed legislation to prohibit it. These growing forms of Māori trade ceased as a result.

Contemporary experiences

In a recent Whanganui iwi adult literacy study, iwi members spoke about the meaning that literacy holds for them (Rāwiri, 2008). Elders described how to them, reading and writing means deceit and duplicity. They talked about literacy as a tool used to desecrate their revered sacred places, to dispossess them of their ancestral homelands, and to all but destroy cherished ways of life. They spoke about the humiliation and deep hurt suffered from being hit at school for speaking their mother tongue.

Parents in this study spoke of the shame they carry from not being able to speak their ancestral language to their children, and how enriched their life would have been had they grown up speaking te reo as their first language. They also talked about the vital importance of protecting and handing down te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga to their grandchildren and future generations.

Institutionalised racism remains the predominant experience of iwi members within education. Because of this, reading and writing are strongly associated with negative experiences of assimilation, cultural denigration and exclusion. Even where iwi members have had positive school experiences, nonetheless, they regard literacy as being mutually-exclusive to ancestral values that provide deep meaning and purpose to life. There is a profound sense of loss felt in the many difficulties they face in maintaining these values.

When talking about why ancestral understandings are important, descendants shared deeply meaningful things. They spoke about being a people woven together by kinship relationships and ancestral belonging. Moreover, ancestral heritage is understood not only to be a precious source of belonging and identity, but also a people and land management system, that is, a way to live one's life based on maintaining respectful relationships.

Scepticism remains within the iwi that reading and writing essentially facilitates an adoption of 'outside' individualistic ideals and behaviours, at the expense of ancestral relationships to land and kin. This has resulted in a general, intergenerational resistance to literacy practice within the iwi. There is an acceptance that literacy skills are a necessity in today's dominant Pākehā society, particularly to interact with 'outside' peoples and gain employment. However, the prevailing view is that literacy is mutually-exclusive to the ancestral values that provide the basis for living a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Yet, the study also found that iwi members willingly engage in literacy practice when it serves as a practical memory aid for carrying out iwi activities. When reading and writing are embedded in iwi everyday life, literacy activity becomes personally meaningful and descendants participate in literacy practice. The findings reveal that it is not improved literacy skills that facilitate literacy engagement; instead, the causal determinants of engagement are the social meanings attached to literacy practice.

When iwi ways of life are removed from literacy contexts, so, too, are the conditions for effective learning and participation. Equally so, when literacy is embedded in ancestral values it then becomes meaningful and motivates iwi members to use and improve their literacy skills. Orthodox monolingual and monocultural approaches to literacy do not support this. The study concluded that as a result, at best, literacy will continue to be overlooked by descendants as lacking relevance; at worst, it will be actively resisted as inherently assimilationist (Rāwiri, 2008).

Contemporary aspirations

In the 1980s, Māori began to establish a kaupapa tuku iho [ancestral values-based], or Māori-determined, education system encompassing kōhanga reo [early childhood education], kura kaupapa [primary education], whare kura [secondary education] and wānanga [tertiary education]. Until then, the Māori curriculum had always been determined and controlled by Pākehā through the state (Simon, 1999). The primary goal of kaupapa tuku iho education is to recover and regenerate te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga, however, in doing so, it has also significantly raised Māori literacy participation and outcomes within their respective sectors.

For example, the advent of wānanga saw Māori participation in tertiary education quadruple, and a significant body of literature begin to be produced by Māori that is written in, or about, te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga (Winiata, 2005). Wānanga programmes take a synergistic approach to

literacy by giving equal emphasis to ancestral literacies and reading and writing in te reo and te reo Pākehā. This has transformed Māori literacy participation and outcomes in the tertiary sector (Māori Adult Literacy Working Party, 2001).

A synergistic approach adapts reading and writing in ways that sustain and enhance an ancestral worldview and its inherent values and practices (Hohepa, 2001). It reflects an international shift in focus by indigenous peoples in literacy practice, which is as much about improving their ability to exercise agency over their own lives, as it is about reversing language and cultural loss. By supporting and providing for cultural continuity and dynamism, synergistic literacy practice seeks to reverse the considerable adverse impacts of assimilationist literacy policy.

This approach shifts the discourse concerning literacy participation away from addressing ‘cultural difference’ to improving the ability of Māori and indigenous peoples to be self-determining (Nakata, 2002). Literacy practice becomes a tool to perpetuate ancestral heritage, and to shape, influence and reshape outside knowledges that seek to position indigenous peoples within a perspective that is not their own. Māori and indigenous peoples have consistently asserted that both of these literacy outcomes are equally important for their future survival and prosperity.

In kaupapa tuku iho programmes literacy practice is holistic in nature and emphasises spiritual, cultural, intellectual and collective wellbeing (Metz, 1996). A fundamental barrier to achieving this is the entrenched monolingual and monocultural definition of literacy. Simply having to justify kaupapa tuku iho is a subtle way of undermining its validity from the outset. Another barrier is where funding is denied because kaupapa tuku iho activity is deemed to fall outside adult literacy policy and to be of little benefit to the wider Pākehā population (Yates, 1996).

The aspirations of First Nations and indigenous peoples for literacy have been described as including reading and writing, as well as reconnecting with ancestral ways of learning and values in order to facilitate achievement, affirmation, empowerment, a sense of purpose and self-determination (Antone, 2003). Literacy activity can then encompass the spiritual and the material, ancestral and present-day realities, and deal with past and on-going impacts of colonialism. These impacts include: a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence caused by the denigration of their ancestral heritage, and an internalisation of racism and other negative school experiences.

A First Nations literacy gathering brought together First Nations peoples to identify and advance their adult literacy aspirations. The principles that emerged from their inaugural gathering were:

1. **The learner is the most important person:** the strengths, experiences and aspirations of First Nations learners determine literacy philosophies, teaching practice and curriculum materials, not funding criteria.
2. **A holistic approach inclusive of Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body is critical:** while each is of equal importance, for First Nations peoples Spirit comes first.
3. **Literacy in First Nations languages and culture is paramount:** literacy policy that does not recognise or affirm First Nations languages will further erode First Nations culture and its worldview of interconnectedness.
4. **First Nations peoples have their own ancestral literacies:** recent, print-based literacy is only one type. A national organisation is required to integrate ancestral literacies into teaching practice and resources and coordinate these activities.
5. **Modelling inclusiveness:** of elders, practitioners, learners, youth, on- and off-reserve, Métis and non-First Nations peoples is important. The values embodied in the Medicine Wheel of honesty, kindness, sharing and strength, permeate First Nations literacy activities.
6. **First Nations control of First Nations literacy education:** First Nations peoples know what works and what doesn't for learners. This ensures culturally relevant programs and positive role-modelling for learners, and prevents First Nations literacy from being subsumed and lost within national or provincial literacy strategies.
7. **Adequate long-term funding:** is critical for success (National Aboriginal Design Committee, 2002, p. 6).

Separating Māori and indigenous peoples from their ancestral literacies has had serious adverse social, cultural and environmental consequences on a worldwide scale (Nettle & Romaine, 2000). This closely aligns with a recent history of military and political action taken by settler states to undermine the integrity of indigenous nations (Churchill, 1993; L. Smith, 1999). Colonialism has brought indigenous peoples to the verge of linguistic and cultural extinction. In many cases, it has also caused near total ecosystems-collapse in their ancestral homelands. Restoring ancestral literacies for the wellbeing of their ancestral homelands is just as important as reviving them for the wellbeing of the people.

Functional literacy and social practice literacy

By the 1950s, literacy theory had further developed monolingualism and monoculturalism into notions of functional literacy. Functional literacy theory assumes literacy to be a fixed set of generic, transferable skills, its primary function being to enhance individual and national economic productivity. This became, and arguably remains today, the dominant, entrenched discourse within national and international adult literacy policy (Hamilton & Barton, 2000).

By the 1980s, a major international shift in thinking had started to take place within adult literacy research. Social practice theory emerged from critical research findings to promote an understanding and recognition of multiliteracies; that is, multiple texts and multiple purposes for reading and writing texts in different social and cultural contexts. It also cautions against the way that orthodox approaches entrench structural inequities between dominant and marginalised peoples (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004).

To avoid this, social practice theory suggests that the social practices of indigenous and other marginalised peoples should be integrated into adult literacy policy (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004). This would transform reading and writing into a meaningful and purposeful activity, which is an essential element for raising literacy engagement. Facilitating this requires time, understanding, and a commitment to addressing a broader framework of complex systemic issues and structural barriers.

The implications of social practice research are not new. They resonate with a body of academic and research work by indigenous and non-indigenous scholars that has consistently promoted a reconceptualisation of adult literacy to be inclusive of Māori and indigenous aspirations to validate cherished ancestral ways of life (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Nakata, 2002). Despite being now well established, this extensive body of work has yet to be integrated into national and international adult literacy strategy in any substantive or meaningful way. This demonstrates how pervasive biases towards functional literacy are, and how difficult it is to make change.

Monolingualism and monoculturalism are, for the most part, eurocentric assumptions that are so widely taken for granted as being ‘what adult literacy is about’, that they are extremely difficult to challenge let alone change (Yates, 1996). The irony and immense difficulty of seeking to change literacy orthodoxy that continues to legitimate deeply entrenched colonial beliefs is not lost on Māori and other indigenous peoples. Literacy policy continues to influence the level of autonomy, or conversely the level of subjugation, within which they are able to operate. The Māori Adult Literacy Working Party encapsulated this discourse by proposing the following definition of literacy:

Literacy is a lifelong journey of building the capacity to ‘read’ and shape Māori and other worlds. (Māori Adult Literacy Working Group, 2001, p. 7)

Te Wānanga o Raukawa and the survival of Māori as a people

The ART Confederation is a confederation of three iwi: Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Toa Rangatira. In 1975, the Confederation found itself separated from the sources of its survival as a people: the taonga tuku iho [ancestral treasures] of te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga. Refusing to become completely severed from them, it launched a 25-year iwi development plan called *Whakatupuranga Rua Mano—Generation 2000* (Winiata, 2005). The plan’s activity sought to reverse a recent history that had brought the Confederation to the verge of extinction as a people.

This recovery activity was, and still is, no easy task. The Confederation's connection to their sources of survival was severed to the point where the remnants of their taonga tuku iho were almost lost from this world. They were disappearing with the passing of each generation. At the time, no one under the age of 30 years old was able to speak te reo; all but one of their marae [ancestral communal land and houses] were in disrepair and in decline; their people were failing to achieve in education; and the Confederation, as a group, exercised little influence over its affairs and its future (Winiata, 2005).

In its *Wānanga capital establishment Wai 718 report*, the Waitangi Tribunal described the events that led to this state of affairs in the following way:

[M]ātauranga [ancestral knowledge] was systematically dismissed and erased by the English-derived education system as being worthless. This was seen by Pākehā as being a natural process of 'civilising' Māori, a clear example of ethnocentric thinking which concerned the assimilation of Māori into the European way of life....

Past legislative actions of the Crown have effectively resulted in a raupatu [confiscation] over mātauranga. It cannot be denied that this process has resulted in tragic damage to Māori society. (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, pp. 47–48)

In order to move away from extinction towards survival as a people, in 1981, the Confederation established Te Wānanga o Raukawa as an assertion of self-determination. Its aim was to assist in restoring te reo and mātauranga directly to whānau, hapū and iwi. Te Wānanga o Raukawa is an iwi tertiary institute that is based on an ancestral process of higher learning. The Waitangi Tribunal described the wānanga tertiary model in the following way:

As a verb, 'to wānanga' is to make use of mātauranga in all its forms in order to teach and learn. It is clear that te reo and mātauranga are taonga [ancestral treasures]. Wānanga is given life by these taonga, and in the reciprocal nature of the Māori world, wānanga also serves to give life to te reo and mātauranga. Each is dependent on the others to nurture, sustain and develop....

Wānanga as a system of learning, and a repository of mātauranga, is a taonga in its own right, but does not exist in isolation from te reo and mātauranga. (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, pp. 48–49)

The aspiration for Te Wānanga o Raukawa is to ensure the survival of the Confederation, and Māori, as a people, by reversing recent serious interruptions to the mātauranga continuum. This is expressed by the following ancestral statement of survival:

E kore au e ngaro
he kākano i ruia mai i Rangiātea

I will never be lost
I am a descendant of Rangiātea

The survival activity of Te Wānanga o Raukawa is grounded in kaupapa tuku iho or ancestral values, which are core elements of the Māori world view. The following kaupapa tuku iho guide all our activity:

- **Te Reo:** recovering and regenerating ancestral language, culture and knowledge systems.
- **Whakapapa:** affirming ancestral genealogies.
- **Ūkaipōtanga:** nourishing ancestral homelands.
- **Whanaungatanga:** expressing belonging and interconnectedness.
- **Kaitiakitanga:** demonstrating custodianship.
- **Manaakitanga:** practicing generosity, humility and respectfulness.
- **Wairuatanga:** paying deep respect to the spiritual realm for spiritual wellbeing.
- **Pūkengatanga:** striving for excellence for individual and collective wellbeing.
- **Kotahitanga:** working towards a common purpose for collective wellbeing.
- **Rangatiratanga:** behaving in ways that are self-determining.

As noted earlier, Te Wānanga o Raukawa takes a synergistic approach to literacy practice by giving equal emphasis to ancestral literacies and reading and writing. In the classroom, te reo and whakapapa studies are compulsory and comprise 50 percent of the content of all undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Further, kaupapa tuku iho determines the curriculum of elective studies, as well as the management, teaching and research of the Wānanga.

The vital role of this recovery activity in the tertiary landscape was described by the Waitangi Tribunal in this way:

Wānanga is essentially a process of education [that] places primary significance on te reo and mātauranga. Despite Māori initiatives to halt the decline of te reo, the language is still in a perilous state.... Other [tertiary institutes may] have Māori Studies Departments, but te reo and mātauranga are not central tenets of universities and polytechnics in the way they are to wānanga.... In this regard, wānanga are unique (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, pp. 49–50).

The state has recognised in legislation the distinctiveness of the kaupapa tuku iho activity of Te Wānanga o Raukawa in section 162(4)(b)(iv) of the Education Amendment Act 1990 (Winiata, 2005), which says:

A wānanga is characterised by teaching and research that maintains, advances and disseminates knowledge, develops intellectual independence, and assists the application of knowledge regarding āhuatanga Māori (Māori tradition) according to tikanga Māori (Māori custom).

Tertiary literacy policy: Entrenching monolingualism and monoculturalism

In 2009, the Tertiary Education Commission launched the state's embedded literacy strategy for the tertiary sector (Tertiary Education Commission, 2009). The overall goal of the strategy was to target support to raise the literacy skills of entry-level learners within the sector. As part of the strategy, Te Wānanga o Raukawa was required by the Commission to develop a plan for embedding literacy within our programmes. We responded by submitting a kaupapa tuku iho approach to literacy embedding that aligned with our core purpose and activity.

The Commission rejected our plan stating that we would only be funded for literacy activity prescribed by its strategy. We were required to remove our kaupapa tuku iho approach and implement the Commission's largely functional approach to literacy embedding, and monolingual and monocultural resources that did not fit with our kaupapa tuku iho activity. This greatly reduced the effectiveness of the strategy. We continued, however, to advocate the importance of kaupapa tuku iho and became an advisory group member of three projects initiated later by the Commission.

The first project was instigated to redevelop aspects of the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool. The Assessment Tool is an online tool that assesses the reading, writing, numeracy and vocabulary skills of adult learners. For four years Te Wānanga o Raukawa urged the Tertiary Education Commission to address the concerns raised by Wānanga staff and students about the unsuitability of the Tool for kaupapa tuku iho learning environments. When other tertiary providers found that the monocultural nature of the Tool had resulted in incorrect assessments for Māori learners, the Commission initiated a project to develop kaupapa-based reading assessment items specifically for Māori learners.

The second project, called *He Taunga Waka* (Ako Aotearoa, 2016), was initiated by the Commission to deliver professional development workshops that support culturally appropriate literacy tuition to adult Māori and Pasifika learners. It is a small-scale 2-year project and there was very little time or resourcing allocated to developing the workshops, and no commitment to continue the project in the long-term.

The Tertiary Education Commission also initiated a third project to develop a national Māori adult literacy strategy. The project produced a draft strategy called *Haea Te Pū Ata*, which took an evidence-based approach by integrating within it research findings that kaupapa tuku iho are critical to Māori literacy engagement (NZCER, 2014, 2015a). It also reflected social practice theory by building

the draft strategy around the everyday literacy practice of adult Māori learners within their whānau. Consultation feedback from the Māori literacy sector and Māori communities overwhelmingly supported this approach (NZCER, 2015b).

The Commission's response to the draft strategy, however, was not positive. It responded that *Haea Te Pū Ata* (Tertiary Education Commission, 2015) fell outside its legislative functions, therefore it would not be implemented as a strategy in its own right. Instead, it would be reduced to a work stream within existing tertiary literacy policy. No further explanatory details were provided. The differences between a strategy and a work stream are significant. A strategy establishes new kaupapa-based leadership and organisational structures, policy and resourcing. None of these changes will be made within a work stream. This greatly affects the stability and further development of any kaupapa-based literacy activity.

Further, relegating Māori literacy activity to a work stream entrenches the state's largely functional, monolingual and monocultural approach to adult literacy. By subsuming *Haea Te Pū Ata* under its existing strategy, the Tertiary Education Commission has effectively shifted decision-making concerning literacy policy for Māori to wider tertiary and industry sector participants who do not have any knowledge of kaupapa tuku iho or the literacy experiences and aspirations of Māori. This was reflected often in the discussions of the advisory groups that Te Wānanga o Raukawa participated in.

We would suggest that, in fact, a national Māori adult literacy strategy that is grounded in kaupapa tuku iho does fall well within the state's legislative commitments to wānanga, and its various strategic and policy commitments to supporting 'Māori success as Māori' within its *Tertiary Education Strategy 2014–2019* (Ministry of Education and Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2014) and *Ka Hikitia: Māori Education Strategy 2013–2017* (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Tertiary literacy policy places immense pressure on Te Wānanga o Raukawa to assimilate into activity that exclusively perpetuates a non-Māori view of the world. In doing so, it is a source of conflict and discord. It is a new form of assimilation that redefines our literacy goals and priorities in purely functional and economic terms. Economic development is fundamental to our wellbeing, but only living according to kaupapa tuku iho will assure our survival as a people in today's world. Both are of equal importance, but they are not given equal consideration in tertiary literacy policy.

We have found it extremely difficult to engage with the state given its confinement of these issues to what it describes as 'national interest' goals. Our position challenges this stance in order to rectify the imbalance that led to the dominance of monolingualism and monoculturalism, and the gradual, near extinction of te reo me ōna tikanga, me ōna mātauranga over the last 176 years. This imbalance has entrenched assimilation and neocolonialism within tertiary literacy policy.

Shortly, we will be filing a claim with the Waitangi Tribunal alleging significantly prejudicial behaviour in breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi [The Treaty of Waitangi, a treaty entered into between iwi and the Crown] on the part of the Crown in its tertiary literacy policy and wider tertiary education policy. Our position is that we do not simply want to articulate grievances, although we do wish to state our issues strongly and clearly, but more than this we want to articulate a positive, forward-looking vision.

In pursuing kaupapa tuku iho, we seek to regenerate taonga tuku iho and strengthen our connections to them. Only taonga tuku iho carry the insights and understandings specific to a Māori worldview. The effects of engaging with them on learners and their whānau are profound. There is no doubt that learners gain meaningful fulfilment and strength from them which resonates to their whānau and, from there, out into the wider world.

Assertions by Te Wānanga o Raukawa to gain a wider acceptance of kaupapa tuku iho, and appropriate acknowledgement of, and support for, our recovery activity, have tended to be treated by the state as a direct challenge to its authority rather than an opportunity to engage with iwi as its Tiriti partner in respectful and meaningful ways. The state refuses outright to engage with us concerning its tertiary literacy policy outside national interest goals, despite strong research evidence and consultation feedback from Māori to do so. This adversely impacts on our ability to address the significantly high disengagement by Māori with literacy. The statistics are alarming. According to the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, the majority of Māori adults have poor literacy skills (Satherley & Lawes, 2009).

It is a constant challenge to advocate kaupapa tuku iho to the state. We continue, however, in the positive belief that our relationship with the state can be transformed from one of conflict, to one based on mutual-respect and mutual-benefit, through mechanisms that properly recognise and provide for kaupapa tuku iho in tertiary literacy policy, and wider tertiary education policy.

Conclusion

Within colonial discourses, literacy policy for Māori was primarily concerned with addressing ‘cultural inferiority’ within an agenda of colonial imperialism. This has now expanded into neocolonial discourses of providing special learning support to address ‘cultural difference’ and support economic development within a wider agenda of neoliberalism. For Māori, the outcome is the same: an outright dismissal of our literacy realities and aspirations, and ongoing assimilation and marginalisation. The review of literature in this article suggests that this outcome is, in fact, the principal determining factor for the significantly high levels of Māori disengagement with literacy today.

In contrast, Māori and indigenous literacy aspirations are to preserve ancestral belonging and connections, and to restore respectful relationships between distinct peoples. The literature suggests that within historical and contemporary contexts, when these aspirations become reality, they are the principal determining factors for Māori engagement with literacy. They also restore ancestral literacy practice to its central role in the survival of Māori, and indigenous peoples, as distinct peoples. These aspirations are fundamental to the kaupapa tuku iho activity of Te Wānanga o Raukawa.

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