

*Te Wānanga o Raukawa: Transforming the Colonial State of New Zealand  
Through Education*

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The European Conference on Education 2017  
Official Conference Proceedings

**Abstract**

Within the settler state of New Zealand, education has been a force for social transformation, both positive and negative. Throughout the first 150 years of contact between the indigenous Māori and the British colonists, education was one of the strategies employed to assimilate Māori; they were transformed from members of sovereign nations (iwi) into British subjects. Not only did the state education system operate to eradicate Māori language and culture; it also relegated Māori people to the margins of the colonial economy, limiting their access to academic qualifications and grooming them to become manual labourers.

This social experiment resulted in both physical and cultural impoverishment for Māori. By the mid-1900s, statistics revealed their extreme social, political and economic vulnerability. There were also unmistakable signs—dwindling numbers able to speak the language, for example—of a rapidly growing sense of cultural disconnection.

In 1975, a coalition of three iwi (known as the ART confederation) launched a counter-assimilatory strategy which focused on revitalisation of Māori language, reconnection with cultural institutions and restoration of traditional values to the heart of Māori thinking and practice. Central to this activity has been the establishment of Te Wānanga o Raukawa. This tertiary education institution has redefined the notion of educational achievement for Māori. It seeks to transform Māori futures and, in so doing, to transform the colonial state of New Zealand. Once again education is being utilised as a tool for social change; but this time, Māori are wielding it and the goal is *decolonisation*.

Keywords: Māori education, colonisation, decolonisation, assimilation, cultural recovery

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## Introduction

Within the settler state of New Zealand, education has been a force for social transformation, both positive and negative. Throughout the first 150 years of contact between the indigenous Māori and the British colonists, education was one of the strategies employed to assimilate Māori; their language and culture were all but eradicated as they were transformed from members of sovereign nations (iwi) into British subjects.

By 1975, an alliance of three iwi (also known as the ART confederation) realised that they were fast approaching the point of irreversible cultural collapse. They launched Whakatupuranga Rua Mano: Generation 2000, a counter-assimilatory strategy which focused on revitalisation of Māori language, reconnection with cultural institutions and restoration of traditional values to the heart of Māori thinking and practice. Central to this activity has been the establishment of Te Wānanga o Raukawa, a tertiary education institution that seeks to transform Māori futures and, in so doing, to transform the colonial state of New Zealand.

This paper describes the painful history that brought the ART confederation to the brink of cultural annihilation, and tracks the progress that has been made towards recovery in the four decades since Whakatupuranga Rua Mano: Generation 2000 was first instigated.

Ngāti Raukawa is one of the Māori iwi (nations) of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Our territory is located in the southwestern part of an island that we call Te Ika-a-Māui (the fish hauled up by Māui), but which is perhaps better known internationally by the rather less imaginative name “The North Island”. We were rendered virtually landless by 1900, but our traditional territory remains crucial to our identity as Ngāti Raukawa. Our boundaries are marked by geographical features: rivers, streams, mountains and sea. We have close ties with two neighbouring iwi, Te Āti Awa and Ngāti Toa Rangatira; collectively, the three iwi now refer to ourselves as the ART confederation. The iwi of Ngāti Raukawa is divided into over 20 smaller political groupings, known as hapū. Traditionally, our people lived in hapū-based communities. Each hapū has its own territory and its own communal centre or centres, known as “marae”. The name of my hapū is Ngāti Pareraukawa and our marae is called Ngātokowaru.

Imperial history typically records that Abel Tasman “discovered” and named New Zealand in 1642—a version of events that we refute, given that by that time our ancestors had long-since discovered it, named it and made it their home. According to our colonisers, James Cook re-discovered us in 1769 and after that there was a gradual increase in the numbers of British nationals who arrived on our shores: whalers, sealers, traders, missionaries and, in 1839, a group of land speculators operating under the name of the New Zealand Company.

These developments culminated in an agreement being signed in 1840 between the freshly appointed Governor, William Hobson, and over 500 leaders of various Māori nations. The terms of that agreement have been in contention ever since. This is not surprising, given that Māori leaders signed one document but the Crown has spent over 170 years insisting that they were really agreeing to the terms of a second

document instead—a document that was neither discussed nor signed, a document that said something entirely different.<sup>1</sup>

Controversy over its intended meaning aside, this 1840 agreement is generally regarded as marking the establishment of the settler colony of New Zealand. As in other settler colonies, the indigenous inhabitants of Aotearoa were subsequently swamped by rapid immigration, decimated by introduced diseases and severely affected by the economic deprivation that occurred as a result of the forcible removal of our lands and the devastation of our waterways (Pool, 2015). Ngāti Raukawa, for example, suffered a population decline of over 50 percent between 1850 and 1878 (Mikaere, 2016). By the 1890s the combined Māori population had plummeted, from a pre-contact figure of somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000<sup>2</sup> to approximately 42,000 (Pool, 1991); our extinction was being confidently predicted by colonial politicians who consoled one another with the thought that they would be on hand to smooth the pillow of the dying race.<sup>3</sup>

Their confidence turned out to be misplaced; some of us survived. The strategy of assimilation served to incorporate the survivors into the colonial state. Assimilation sought to “civilise” Māori, remaking us in the image of the coloniser by replacing our language with English, substituting British laws for our own and supplanting our belief systems with Christianity. As in many other settler colonies, the education system played a pivotal role in this exercise because the colonisers rightly understood that the key to any people’s future is their children. Simon and Smith (2001) observe:

New Zealand was not alone in setting out to civilise or assimilate its indigenous population through schooling. Education systems in other societies colonised by European powers shared many of the same characteristics. They all had a mission to assimilate, civilise and settle their native populations, and believed in their own cultural superiority.

Every opportunity was taken to instil feelings of patriotism within Māori pupils. Simon (1998) provides compelling photographic evidence of geography lessons that reinforced the might of the British Empire; of birthdays of the British royal family being formally celebrated; and of significant imperial anniversaries (such as Trafalgar Day) being marked with flag-raising ceremonies. Military drills and singing “God Save the Queen”, as well as the nauseating New Zealand national anthem, became

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<sup>1</sup> Governor Hobson and all but 39 of the approximately 540 Māori signatories signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi, a document written in the Māori language that delegated authority to the Crown to regulate the conduct of British citizens in Aotearoa, while acknowledging the overriding authority of Māori nations. Since 1840 the Crown has argued that, in signing Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori were in fact agreeing to the terms of a separate, English-language document, the terms of which stated that Māori were ceding sovereignty to the Crown in return for a promise to protect their property rights. It is worth noting, however, that the Waitangi Tribunal (2014) recently found that the rangatira who signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the far north, during February 1840, did not cede sovereignty.

<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the Māori population at 1769 vary wildly, from 100,000 to 500,000 (Durie, 1998). Durie settles on an estimate of 150,000 by 1800; while Pool (2015) suggests that a figure closer to 100,000 is more probable.

<sup>3</sup> This is taken from the oft-quoted statement of Dr Isaac Featherston, Superintendent of Wellington Province: “The Maoris are dying out and nothing can save them. Our plain duty as good compassionate colonists is to smooth their dying pillow. Then history will have nothing to reproach us with” (Buller, 1884).

part of the school routine. Māori were effectively brainwashed into becoming British subjects,<sup>4</sup> their membership of hapū and iwi rendered increasingly irrelevant with each passing generation.

Ironically, many Māori had initially embraced the European notion of education. Ngāti Raukawa gave land and financial support so that schools could be established within our region. It is clear that in so doing, the iwi was seeking to add to its own intellectual tradition, recognising the importance of coming to grips with European knowledge in order to maintain its authority. However, the colonial government's educational policies were motivated by an entirely different set of objectives. They sought not to complement Māori knowledge, but rather to replace it. Far from seeking to enhance Māori authority, the Crown was committed to undermining it (Simon, 1998).<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the desire of Māori parents to expand the educational horizons of their children was thwarted by the racism of public servants who believed that Māori people should be taught to “recognise the dignity of manual labour” (Hogben, 1906) and who argued that “the natural genius of the Maori in the direction of manual skills” (Bird, 1907) meant that academic subjects would be wasted on us. The point of Māori education, they insisted, was to prepare us for life amongst ourselves, not to encourage us to “mingle with Europeans in trade and commerce” (Bird, 1906).

The long-term consequences of this social experiment were predictable enough. After generations of having been channelled into labouring jobs, many Māori started to believe the racist stereotyping of the coloniser, becoming convinced that they were genetically incapable of tackling academic subjects. In 1960, a “statistical blackout” of Māori at the higher levels of education was reported, with just 0.5 percent of Māori students making it to the final year of secondary school (Hunn, 1960). By the early 1970s, over 75 percent of Māori children were leaving school with no formal qualifications whatsoever (Walker, 2004).

Meanwhile, our language had been targeted for annihilation. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Māori children were being physically punished for speaking Māori at school. Before long, Māori parents stopped transmitting the language to their children, fearful of the consequences of doing so and convinced in any case that it was of no value—that English was the language of the future (Waitangi Tribunal 1986). The consequences were dramatic. In 1913 90 percent of Māori schoolchildren could speak Māori; by 1953 this figure had fallen to 26 percent; by 1975 it had dropped to fewer than five percent (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986).

The language suffered a similar fate within my iwi. Ngāti Raukawa participants in a significant study reported that in 1900, all of their family members had understood Māori and 75 percent of them had spoken the language fluently. By 1970 a little over

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<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that by the nineteenth century, when Britain became embroiled in two global conflicts, Māori were among the first to volunteer for military service. My grandfather served in the Pioneer Battalion during World War I; and the only reason my father did not serve in the Māori Battalion during World War II was because the war ended before he was old enough to sign up.

<sup>5</sup> The view that schools might best be seen as “the cheapest garrisons” because of their ability “to maintain peace, inculcate a reverence for the laws, and a ready obedience to constituted authority” (*New Zealand Spectator and Cook's Strait Guardian*, 27 June 1849) was fairly typical for the time.

five percent understood Māori while fewer than five percent spoke it; for over 80 percent of them, English had become the *only* means of communication (Benton, 1997).

By this stage, the very fabric of our existence had been torn apart. The hapū—the crucial social and political unit within the iwi that I spoke about earlier—was barely functional. By way of example, my father and his siblings were all born at our marae, Ngātokowaru, where they lived surrounded by relatives. But when he was about four years old, his parents made the difficult decision to move away. There was no longer sufficient land available to support everyone so my grandfather secured employment elsewhere. Others were eventually forced to follow. Marae throughout the iwi of Ngāti Raukawa fell into disrepair. Once the hub of hapū life, they became associated almost exclusively with death—places where people went to mourn and bury their relatives and, it might be said, their culture too. As Selby (1999) has recounted:

During the mid-1970s many of our meeting houses and the surrounding marae and land were in a poor state of repair, had been neglected for a number of years, were being used intermittently throughout the year [and] were regarded by many as dying institutions.

In 1975 the three iwi of the ART confederation took stock of the situation. Our marae were disintegrating, our language was near-death and our relegation to the margins of the colonial economy had left many of our people vulnerable to unemployment, ill-health and a raft of social problems. We were fast approaching what some have called “cultural threshold”: the point where, under the immense pressure of an outside culture, there is cultural collapse beyond which recovery—and survival as a people—becomes impossible (Rāwiri, 2012).

A survival strategy was designed and implemented, with the express goal of preparing the confederation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Entitled Whakatupuranga Rua Mano: Generation 2000, the 25-year strategy articulated four key objectives: restoration of marae throughout the confederation; development and retention of our people; revitalisation of the language; and the pursuit of self-determination (Walker, 2011).

Significant progress has since been made towards meeting these goals. All marae within the confederation have been refurbished or rebuilt and, in many cases, extended (Selby, 1999). While very few of our people now live adjacent to marae, many more of us are being drawn back to it for an ever-expanding range of reasons—not simply to bury one another. My own marae is, once more, regularly used for gatherings for the living: birthdays, christenings, weddings, working bees and as a teaching/learning space. In 2013, for example, events held there included gatherings that focused on goal setting and team building; genealogy; marae history; language; media and music; cooking; gardening; carpentry; project management; water reticulation; and textile conservation (Selby and Barnes, 2013).

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<sup>6</sup> The strategy was proposed by Whatarangi Winiata and adopted by the Raukawa Trustees, a group which represented all three iwi of the ART confederation and which was charged with the responsibility of managing Raukawa marae. Raukawa marae was a parent marae, belonging to all three iwi and located at a central point within the combined territories of the three iwi, in the small town of Ōtaki. An early articulation of Whakatupuranga Rua Mano appears in Winiata (1979).

Considerable progress has been made with revitalising the language too. In 1975 the ART confederation had no Māori speakers under the age of 30 (Winiata, 1979). By 1995 there were 600 young people who were reasonably competent speakers; by 2010 that number had risen to approximately 4000 (Walker, 2011).

Whakatupuranga Rua Mano was also a powerful expression of self-determination: it came from the people; it was for the people; and it was implemented by the people. It amply demonstrated the benefits of determining for ourselves our goals and priorities, as opposed to waiting for direction or permission from the Crown.

Often referred to as the modern successor to Whakatupuranga Rua Mano, tertiary education institution Te Wānanga o Raukawa (“the Wānanga”) was established in 1981. Described by Winiata (1979) as Whakatupuranga Rua Mano’s “most important proposal”, the Wānanga was created to promote research and study into the origins, history, literature and contemporary developments of the ART confederation. It ran on voluntary labour until 1993, since when it has received enrolments-based funding from the Crown.<sup>7</sup> It remains a small player in the tertiary sector, reaching approximately 1400 full-time equivalent enrolments in 2016. It offers a range of programmes, from certificates and diplomas to bachelors and masters degrees. Its most senior qualification, Te Kāurutanga, requires the completion of a major thesis and takes the equivalent of three or more years of full-time study. It is awarded by Ngā Purutanga Mauri, a group of elders who are representative of the three founding iwi of the Wānanga and who are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the Wānanga remains true to its founding principles.

The principles of Whakatupuranga Rua Mano continue to underpin the activities of the Wānanga. Revitalisation of the language is a central feature of its academic programmes, with almost all of its qualifications including a significant component of language studies. Similarly, iwi and hapū studies form a compulsory component of almost all academic programmes. Students are required to undertake research on a range of topics related to their marae, their hapū and their iwi. For some, this has been regarded as a welcome opportunity to enhance their knowledge of themselves. For others, it has been a powerful motivating factor in a decision to rekindle connections that had been weakened, or even lost, during the past few generations.

Wānanga qualifications cover a range of specialist subjects: teaching, administration, Māori knowledge traditions, Māori laws and philosophy, health and well-being, science, traditional and performing arts. As it continues to expand these offerings, and with its emphasis on strengthening language and reconnecting students with their hapū and iwi, the Wānanga is also playing a key role in developing and retaining the people of the confederation. It is providing educational pathways to our people that are specifically designed to enhance their ability to contribute to the collective wellbeing of hapū and iwi.

Establishing the Wānanga has been a powerful expression of self-determination. Undeterred at the Crown’s lack of interest in the 1978 proposal to establish a Centre

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<sup>7</sup> Section 36 of the Education Amendment Act 1990 added “wānanga” as a category of tertiary education institutions that could be established pursuant to section 162 of the Education Act 1989: it was 1993 before Te Wānanga o Raukawa was formally recognised within the terms of the statutory regime.

of Learning, the people carried on regardless. It was twelve years before the Crown grudgingly came to the table, offering limited financial support.<sup>8</sup> Ironically, any sense of freedom that one might expect to come with external funding has been matched by unease at the knowledge that Crown funding brings with it a Crown sense of entitlement to interfere in our work. The tension between our commitment to maintaining autonomy, and the Crown's determination to override that autonomy wherever possible, is ongoing.

I can do no more today than provide the barest overview of the social transformation that has been brought about by Whakatupuranga Rua Mano and by its successor, Te Wānanga o Raukawa. However, a brief snapshot of the community of Ōtaki, where the Wānanga is located, provides some idea of what has been achieved.

Ōtaki is located near the mid-point of the area covered by the ART confederation. In 1975 the town had a population of 4,200 people, 13.2 percent of whom identified as Māori (Selby, 2016). Aside from a small and rapidly diminishing group of elders, no one spoke the language. Most of our people had all but turned their backs on their own culture, focusing instead on making their way in what was commonly referred to as “the Pākehā world”.<sup>9</sup> The largest employer in the town was a poultry farm and processing plant.

Following the establishment of Te Wānanga o Raukawa, parental demand for Māori-immersion educational options, from pre-school through to secondary school and beyond, rocketed. The growth in Māori schools and pre-schools within the town was so rapid that there was a shortage of appropriately trained teachers, a gap that the Wānanga moved to fill by establishing teacher training programmes. Language revival, realised through the implementation of education initiatives, has proven to be the catalyst for the transformation of the community. Selby (2016) notes:

Māori education services to strengthen the Māori mind have driven community change in Ōtaki. Recognising the potential within the community was a statement of self-determination, and was fundamental to rebuilding language and cultural competency, which then provided the infrastructure for other activities.

With a population of 5778 recorded in the 2013 national census, Ōtaki is still small but it is a very different town to what it was in 1975. 33.4 percent of the population identify as Māori. Māori education is by far the biggest employer and contributor to

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<sup>8</sup> I use the term “grudgingly” because the Crown has continued to underfund Te Wānanga in a number of significant respects. For instance, in 1998 Te Wānanga o Raukawa joined forces with the other two wānanga (Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, based in Hamilton and Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, based in Whakatāne) to bring the Capital Establishment claim before the Waitangi Tribunal. The gravamen of their complaint was that all other tertiary education providers, throughout Aotearoa, had been provided with capital establishment funding. Despite a favourable Tribunal finding (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999), it was a further nine years before Te Wānanga o Raukawa achieved settlement of its claim against the Crown. The Wānanga is currently preparing a further Waitangi Tribunal claim which sets out a range of respects in which we are being unfairly treated within the Crown's research and tertiary funding regimes.

<sup>9</sup> “Pākehā” is the term used by Māori to describe the British colonisers; it is now widely used within Aotearoa/New Zealand, both by Māori and by later arrivals, to describe the white population.

the local economy. The town boasts multiple immersion education options: six pre-schools, two year 1-13 schools and the Wānanga. Māori families from all over Aotearoa move to Ōtaki for the specific purpose of pursuing these options, parents enrolling in the Wānanga programmes while their children enter the pre-schools and schools.

Approximately half of all Māori in Ōtaki are now able to speak the language—more than twice the figure reported for Māori throughout Aotearoa (Selby, 2016). The language has been re-normalised, with conversations in Māori regularly occurring in public—on the street, in the supermarket, on the sports field. Unlike many other places within Aotearoa, hearing Māori being spoken provokes neither surprise nor antagonism on the part of non-Māori, who have simply grown accustomed to it. The town has become a kind of sanctuary for Māori language and culture.

Current Tumuaki (Chief Executive Officer) of Te Wānanga o Raukawa, Mereana Selby, notes (2016) that language has been the key to the transformation that has taken place in Ōtaki:

Language and thought are indivisibly interwoven. The ability to not only communicate in one's native tongue but to think within that cultural framework is a basic human right. When it is reclaimed it is extraordinarily empowering. Through focusing on competency in the language, we have set the path for our people to once again see the world through Māori eyes.

The ability to see the world through Māori eyes is precisely what decades of assimilatory policy, primarily implemented through state education, was designed to eliminate. The policy was ruthlessly successful, bringing Māori to the point of cultural collapse. For Ngāti Raukawa, as for other Māori nations, reversing the ill-effects of assimilation is a matter of survival. Initiatives such as Te Wānanga o Raukawa show that we have taken a leaf out of the coloniser's book. Once again, education is being utilised to effect radical social change; but this time, we are wielding it and the goal is *decolonisation*.



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