

PREJUDICE, PATHWAYS AND PAVLOVA: A PARADOX OF SUCCESS

Personal reflections of Sir Toby Curtis

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a keynote address presented at the 2017 annual Māori Research Colloquium at the University of Canterbury. The paper provides a snapshot of the history of education in New Zealand, and presents a story of success in the face of enormous social and psychological challenges brought about by historical events and government policies, over time. It is written from an insider's perspective, and is peppered with personal reflections from its author, one of New Zealand's pre-eminent educationalists, Sir Toby Curtis, who achieved at the highest levels of education in New Zealand and abroad, and was knighted for his services to Māori education. Sir Toby reflects on the apportioning of power between Māori and non-Māori within the education system, and seeks to determine how an imbalance may have contributed to inequitable educational outcomes for Māori in the last 180 years. The following questions emerge from these ruminations:

1. In what ways has power imbalance within the New Zealand education system impacted on educational experiences and outcomes for Māori?
2. How have these educational experiences manifested within (and beyond) the system?
3. What meanings and aspirations can be taken from the whakataukī 'He moana pukekepuke, e kengia/A choppy sea can be navigated'?

In essence, this paper seeks to dig beneath the surface of past occurrences in order to shed some light on the questions posed above. Sir Toby commences by sifting through the history of colonial influences on education in this country, and sprinkles this with his own experiences going to school, many of which were plagued by challenges of various forms. Sir Toby makes bold and often astute observations about the impact of colonial policy on Māori (and how it affected him personally), and redirects the emphasis by proposing a pathway forward for the future of Māori education. At its core, this paper tells a personal story within a larger story of a determination to triumph over notions of inferiority and oppression – it is a story of resilience and a story of hope.

Melissa Derby and Sonja Macfarlane, of Te Rū Rangahau Māori Research Laboratory at the University of Canterbury, were primary hosts to Sir Toby during his visits to the academy. They documented Sir Toby's story as he told it, and graciously offered a prologue.

PREJUDICE

Sir Toby begins ...

I have often wondered, why, for virtually all my schooling years, I never believed in myself. I was part of a community where there was an unspoken belief that high academic achievement at secondary school and at tertiary institutions was the domain of others. To gain a pass in the School Certificate examinations, one was considered a real 'brain box'.

During the pre mid-twentieth century, the reality for most of our whānau [family] was a constant deprivation of tasting educational success. Being Māori was our lived experience, it was our norm. . . Conversely, there was an unquestioning belief that if you were Pākehā (non-Māori of European descent), there was a greater likelihood that one would achieve to higher educational levels. These erroneous yet insidious beliefs had a huge impact on many Māori, myself included. How did such notions come to be? What might be revealed by way of a deeper exploration of the underlying factors that contributed to Pākehā domination and Māori subjugation within the education system?

Generally accepted understandings about the chronology of British settlement go some way toward answering these questions. There appear to be copious accounts of a colonising agenda of settler governments that resulted in the denigration and systematic undermining of the legitimacy and validity of Māori language, knowledge, culture and values. This agenda, and its associated policies and practices, has had far-reaching implications for Māori which are still felt today, impacting on factors ranging from self-esteem to socio-economic outcomes for whānau, to struggling community dynamics.

Essentially, the British expansion into the new world set in motion the relegation of the tangata whenua, the first nations people of the land, in those aspects of human existence that count – social, psychological and cultural. And the rapid change came at a cost.

For several hundred years, our forebears lived and cared for the well-being of Aotearoa. They were guardians of the land, forests, geothermal, rivers, lakes, and the sea expanse around both islands. They named every plant, mountain, river, waterway, lake, forest, hill, nook and cranny. They developed a close living relationship with their environment through the assignment of global portfolios to different deities. Ranginui, the Sky Father, and Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, were instrumental in prevailing upon an order for all things. Their children reigned supreme in the range of geographical realms, guarding and caring for the resources within their respective domains. From time to time, prohibitions were imposed to preserve the sanctity of humanity or to protect nature from unwanted despoliation. Prior to the arrival of the new settlers, Māori lived a life where the terrestrial, celestial and spiritual needs of human requirements were defined, structured and balanced so as to ensure harmony prevailed.

Māori owned all of the land of Aotearoa New Zealand. Fifty years following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the new settlers had acquired more than 50 percent of the land mass. When the Wakefield migration scheme (the New Zealand Company) tipped the demographic scales to numerically favour the new settlers, they set about establishing procedures to enable the introduction of the Westminster model of democracy (sic). On assuming the position of 'law-makers', they were able to establish their role as the ruling class. Accordingly, the acquisition of land became, and remained, a top priority. Government confiscations following the New Zealand Wars, the redefining of many acres of Māori land as 'waste land', together with Māori Land Court decisions, were the principal legal means that enabled the transfer of millions of acres of Māori land into Pākehā ownership. At the same time, the knowledge base which the new settlers brought with them to Aotearoa was to be the all-pervading source that would influence, and map out, a pathway that would take this country forward to a new dawn. It appeared to be, however, a future that would be guided by the hopes and dreams that emanated from the Eurocentric world that the new migrants had left behind.

During these transitional settlement phases, Māori were keen to absorb the new learnings that were being introduced – to build ships and to use firearms, among other skills. The almost insatiable desire for access to foreign skills and knowledge was matched

by a willingness to read, write and count, according to a culture other than their own. Added to the Christian mission of conversion, it appeared, was the government of the day's agenda of assimilation.

This agenda cut at the Māori heart and soul, rendering virtual lifelessness to the tangata whenua. Emotionally and spiritually, it appears that from the 1880s through to the 1930s the Māori will to fight back had all but dissipated. Te Ao Māori reached its lowest ebb, and Pākehā commentators continually predicted a time when Māori would be erased from the face of the planet. Phrases that became commonplace at that time included: "We must smooth the pillow for a dying race.", "The traditional arts have all but gone.", "The Māori language is about to become extinct.", and "It's only a matter of time before the people and their culture will become a relic of the past."

Sir Toby continues ...

I lived through the reality of these disabling views from the age of eight through to my early twenties. I can remember our reliance, and in some instances our almost total dependence, on our Treaty partner. Working with or being administered by Pākehā created a false sense of confidence that we (Māori) would get things right. A consequence of the many patronising sentimentalities was that I developed what was commonly referred to as an 'inferiority complex'. I truly believed that Pākehā were better than me, and that, simply due to the fact I was Māori, I was somehow lesser than they, meaning that achievement to similar heights was not possible, or at least, highly improbable. . As a youngster, I mapped a plan for my future which I believed aligned with my abilities – I would become an electrician at the age of fourteen because school was not the place for me and my Māori friends - it was the domain of our Pākehā contemporaries.

Notwithstanding the compelling influences mentioned above, a core group of Māori bucked the trend. They became beacons of hope and success, and their alma mater, Te Aute College, an exemplary educational site. Te Aute's principal in the late 1870s, John Thornton, believed in motivating able Māori students to take their places in the professions of medicine and law. The outcome of Thornton's programmes was the first wave of Māori graduates in Apirana Ngata, Maui Pomare, Peter Buck, Tutere Wirepa and Rewiti Kohere. Later, as qualified lawyers and doctors, they entered Parliament, and fought for health and economic reforms. Their efforts had a significant impact, and ultimately assisted in the survival of Māori. Other Māori boarding schools of the 1900s, including girls' schools, can boast of graduates whose excellences are beyond reproach. These leaders constituted a challenge to the reigning

monopoly over the power of knowledge. The flame that had been lit would never be extinguished, I would argue.

PAVLOVA

Sir Toby muses ...

When the first contingent of British migrants set foot in this country, these islands were known only as Aotearoa. The name was given by Kuramārōtini, the wife of the discoverer, Kupe. He was a prominent and well-acclaimed navigator throughout the Pacific. The discovery of these islands by Kupe is estimated to have occurred around 925 AD. The story of Kupe's discovery was orally transmitted from one generation to the next. Some 400 years later, about 1350, many of Kupe's people migrated to Aotearoa, as a result of worsening famine and increasing tribal unrest in their islands of origin. Today, the epic migratory events are constantly recalled when tribal or family genealogy is recited.

However, during my primary school years, the school syllabus of the time taught pupils that a Dutchman named Abel Tasman discovered Aotearoa in 1642. He named it New Zealand. Later, an Englishman known as Captain James Cook arrived in 1769. He, too, was acknowledged as a discoverer of Aotearoa. The teachings did not appear keen to accredit Kupe, with confidence and authority, as the first discoverer of our fair land. As a consequence, the following question comes to mind: "How many times can a country be discovered?"

Sir Toby reflects ...

Presenting a heartfelt perspective of the past - with the prospect of avoiding new sufferings in the future - I am compelled to return my thoughts to my childhood years at Rotoehu, a small settlement on the eastern precinct or rural Rotorua. Starting at my birthplace enables me to highlight the features of an imposed education system with its Eurocentric contentions. Perhaps a selection of reflections and revelations of the past may help develop more optimistic pathways as one ventures further into the 21st century.

The first eight years of my life were spent growing up in a community where milling timber was the predominant activity that generated a liveable income. I recollect a community that could be described as reflective of the societal values of the 1940s. While the Māori sector of society lived and behaved with a degree of ease in a Pākehā setting, the same could not be said of Pākehā when in a Māori context. My generation was not encouraged to speak te reo Māori by our parents because they did not want us

punished for speaking the language at school like our older siblings were. An unfortunate outcome was that our ability to speak 'good' English was hindered because the only language we heard spoken in our homes and communities was Māori. My parents spoke very little English, and for me, the upshot was that my ears 'spoke' delightful Māori while my tongue spoke not very good English.

My parents, along with other parents at that time, acquiesced into believing that English was the language for the future. Their native tongue, te reo Māori, was not the language of the teachers who taught their children. Therefore, when Pākehā teachers and the Pākehā community echoed the same message in unison, Māori parents, and indeed Māori society in general, believed that te reo Māori had very little social, economic or international value. As a consequence of this belief in the inferiority of the Māori language - and Māori culture in general - words such as university, tertiary education, and higher education were not mentioned or heard (in either te reo Māori or English) in our home as something for us, as tamariki and rangatahi, to aspire to. The general consensus was that most tamariki and rangatahi did not have the intellectual capabilities to perform successfully at secondary school, or beyond.

In 1867, the government established what became known as Native Schools in tribal areas around the country. The school I attended was Te Waiiti Native School, then several years later it was renamed Rotoiti Māori School. The lessons were conducted predominantly in English, and subsequently, progress of many of the learners was slow. After the turn of the 20th century, authorities banned the use of te reo Māori in school precincts. For five decades, corporal punishment was the means to enforce the suppression of our native language.

While the colonial strategy of corporal punishment is no longer approved, the policy of refusing to use te reo Māori as the language of instruction remains unhelpful, and continues to disadvantage many young Māori learners. Māori-medium educational providers such as Te Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori and Kura-ā-Iwi are carrying out a key role in raising Māori educational achievement and strengthening language and identity. Today, te reo Māori is still not taught as a core subject in our national curriculum. I have always wondered how our Pākehā counterparts would have fared if they were taught solely in te reo Māori, a language that was not spoken in their homes.

Essentially, from the early 1900s through to the mid-20th century, there was a mere thin trickle of Māori into tertiary education. The urban migration of Māori post-World War II also had implications for Māori educational outcomes. In this era, however, the

sector changed its title from the native to the general schools. A change in title, but not, it seems, in format and outcomes. The Hunn Report of the 1960s arrived and departed.

Some would argue that the Hunn Report encouraged Māori and Pākehā to work together to assist in the development of programmes to raise the success level of Māori learners. However, a generation after the Hunn Report, in 1984, many Māori educational leaders realised that this intergenerational saga of failure seemed to be continuing unabated. They were keen to have iwi, hapū and whānau aspirations built into the school curriculum. Such desires would ensure that a Māori education profile was not simply a brown version of the Pākehā model but rather an approach that was culturally-relevant and contextualised to meet the needs of Māori realities. This was unequivocally expressed at a hui [convention] on Māori educational development at Turangawaewae marae [community centre]. The 1984 hui saw more than 300 Māori educators from all sectors of the system come to participate in what became very lively workshop sessions, where the concerns raised were of a uniform nature. The gathering at Turangawaewae represented a cross-section of Māori people, and included noted figures in Māori education and those who specialised in the political milieu. The level of frustration among the convention participants, together with the inability of policy makers to impact on the Māori schooling underachievement crisis, was reflected in the resolutions, which were unanimously adopted at the final plenary. Those were:

1. That in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, Māori communities have the right to have their children educated in te reo Māori, and
2. That the existing system of education was failing Māori people and modifications to date had not helped the situation, nor would they. Therefore, Māori taking action was urged, as was the establishment of Māori schooling modelled on the principles underlying Te Kōhanga Reo.

The government response to the resolutions (which were unanimously adopted) appeared to be immediate and swift, and expedited by a leading newspaper running a high profile story. One suspects that the government of the day may not have wanted to be tainted with operationalising a racially imbalanced system. Several moves followed. These included the elevation of the education portfolio to the number one position in cabinet, the Prime Minister of the time opting to be the Minister of Education, the establishment of the Picot Education Review Committee, the Waitangi Tribunal presenting an Education Report to the Minister of Māori Affairs in

June 1986, and the establishment of Te Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori and Wānanga in relatively quick succession. The 1986 Waitangi Tribunal report was highly critical of the Department of Education's record regarding the mass failure of Māori learners. The report was assertive in its claims of lack of responsiveness to Māori educational needs and aspirations.

Three further perspectives are worthy of consideration. The first perspective is the half-caste contention. This group was perceived as being more like Pākehā, lived in cities, did not speak Māori, and were advancing educationally. The second perspective was of Māori who lived in the cities and were progressing satisfactorily, educationally. The final perspective was of those who continued to speak Māori, opted to remain in rural communities, and were seen to be progressing unsatisfactorily.

As my generation grew beyond our teenage years, we were puzzled by the fact that only one person from our iwi [extended tribe], who was also of our vintage, had gone to university, while a mere handful of us were deemed sufficiently qualified for entry to Teachers' College. A chance encounter with a teacher in my early teens set my career path on a different trajectory, and at age fourteen, I was sent to Saint Peter's Māori Boys' College in Auckland. Upon completing secondary school, I discarded the idea of becoming an electrician, and instead enrolled in Ardmore Teachers' Training College. At the same time, interestingly, a far greater percentage of my Pākehā counterparts enrolled in university study: further evidence, one might contend, of educational disparity. At Ardmore I would become College (Student) President, an important turning point in terms of the development of self-confidence in my early career.

Another turning point was to follow soon after. Upon graduating at Ardmore Teachers' Training College, I was offered a position at a school in Christchurch, a city which, in the 1960s, was starkly different to the places I had lived in the North Island. It was in this role that I experienced first-hand the implications of beliefs about Māori inferiority. I had no idea that the school community did not "want their children taught by a native"; I discovered this by reading it in the newspaper. This astonished me, particularly when I became aware of who had written to the local paper. Some children were taken out of the school at which I was teaching and sent to another school nearby. Initially, I was unsure how to respond, but ultimately decided on implementing a mischievous plan. Not long after this unfortunate set of circumstances occurred, a fundraiser event was held at the school, and I knew from my own upbringing that kai [food] plays a key role in forming relationships. I arrived at this fundraiser with the best pavlova, and won their

hearts. The two years I spent teaching in Christchurch were two of the best of my career.

PATHWAYS

Sir Toby predicts ...

Clearly, given the nature of the content expressed in the previous sections of this paper, prejudice and pavlova, it is clear that the education system has often placed impediments in front of Māori learners and their whānau. My contention is that Te Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori, and Kura-ā-Iwi are significant parts of the solution to improve Māori achievement.

This is easier said than done, and requires courage to take on the political entities and goodwill to acknowledge the affirmative moves some politicians are making. However, if affirmative research evidence and the will of the people were vocalised in a unified call for more of these schools, the tide can turn. Teachers and schools require a level of inborn cultural repertoire, including the regular use of te reo Māori, to enable them to behave naturally and keenly when catering for Māori learners' cognitive, emotional, spiritual and cultural advancements. Māori-medium schools are evidence of the fact that when te reo Māori is the language of instruction for both the teacher and the learner, academic success is more likely to ensue, and punitive disciplinary measures are less-likely to be implemented. It is in these settings, learning our language and living our culture that I believe pave the pathways for educational success, as Māori.

Sir Toby repositions ...

At this juncture, a repositioning takes place and Sir Toby allows scholars of Te Rū Rangahau to continue the paradoxical story of the little boy from Rotoehu becoming a giant in the educational realm. This practice - transitioning from a first person to a third person narrator - is in accord with the famous whakataukī of 'the kūmara not saying how sweet it is'.

A Prologue: *This is based on conversations with Sir Toby in Te Rū Rangahau, the Māori Research Lab of the University of Canterbury, biological notes, and other news sources.*

... Dr Curtis (he graduated with a PhD from the University of Auckland) is one of New Zealand's leading Māori educationalists and is widely respected for his innovative achievements. His career in education has taken him from a primary school teacher to work with intellectually disabled children, to roles as principal of Hāto Petera College and vice-principal of Auckland Teacher's College in the 1980s. In the

1990s, he was Auckland College of Education Director of Primary Teacher Education, Faculty Dean of the Auckland Institute of Technology, and was appointed Deputy Vice Chancellor at Auckland University of Technology in 2000. In 2012, he was appointed chairman of the Iwi Education Authority for Ngā Kura ā Iwi o Aotearoa (Tribal Immersion Schools).

He has also been heavily involved in Māori broadcasting and in 1997 was appointed chairman of Te Māngai Pāhō, the Māori Broadcasting Agency. He chaired a Māori broadcasting advisory committee in the late 1980s, which led to the establishment of Radio Aotearoa, iwi radio stations and Māori Television.

Dr Curtis is chairman of Te Arawa Lakes Trust, deputy chairman of Rotorua Te Arawa Lakes Strategy Group, deputy chairman of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa Council, a member of the Police Commissioner's Forum, the Iwi Leaders Forum, the Regional Police Commander's Forum and chairman of Te Arawa Whānau Ora Region.

Sir Toby was invested in a knighthood in 2014. In his typical quietly-spoken, gentle way he refers to Isaac Newton's metaphor of being able to see farther by standing on the shoulders of giants. With great admiration he refers to other Māori leaders who had overcome prejudices, who had turned educational custard into pavlova, and who had paved pathways so as to unleash Māori potential. Certainly, he had navigated that choppy sea. E te rangatira Tā Toby, nei rā te mihi atu ki a koe mō te nuinga o tō mahi i runga i te puna mātauranga.

Sir Toby acknowledges ...

I would like to thank the University of Canterbury's Te Rū Rangahau Māori Research Laboratory for inviting me to several on-campus events in 2017 and 2018. I am grateful to Research Analyst Melissa Derby and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane for their unwavering hospitality and support. To the Daily Post newspaper I am grateful for the story that was printed in honour of my knighthood.

Ma te Runga Rawa tātau katoa e ārahi e manaaki
May our Maker guide us all toward a constructive
Aotearoa New Zealand future

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sir Toby Curtis



Angus Macfarlane



Melissa Derby



Sonja Macfarlane



After a distinguished career as an educator in Auckland, Sir Toby Curtis (Ngāti Rongomai) returned to his ūkaipō (place of origin) where he assumed tribal leadership roles based around his skills in mātauranga Māori (Maori knowledge), whakaaro Māori (Maori theory) and whaikōerō (oratory). This same set of skills makes Sir Toby a highly sought-after expert advisor, nationally and internationally. Professor Angus Macfarlane (Ngāti Whakae) and Associate Professor Sonja Macfarlane (Ngāti Waewae) are acclimaed educators and social scientists. They are Directors of the Māori Research Laboratory, Te Rū Rangahau, at the University of Canterbury where they have been supported by Melissa Derby (Ngāti Ranginui) who in 2018 – 2019 as awarded a Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Fulbright Scholarship to undertake studies in Colorado State University. Te Rū Rangahau, noted for advancing research that is responsive to Māori and indigenous needs and aspirations, won the 2016 Research Group Award, presented by the New Zealand Association for Research in Education.

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