

# The Intergenerational Perpetuation of Achievement Messages in Māori Whānau

**Kim Marie Southey**

*University of Waikato, MSocSc & PGDipComPsy Student  
NZPS President's (Māori) Scholar, 2002*

The achievement of Māori students within secondary education in general, is something that is being explored by many researchers. At a government level in New Zealand, for example, the reasons for the 'achievement gap' between Māori and non-Māori secondary school students are being investigated (Else, 1997). For many Māori, the choice of mainstream secondary education for their children is made based on a default option of schooling. This default option is dependant on the lack of alternative and more culturally congruent environments of learning, along with the proficiency of language required to attend total immersion schools (McKinley, 2000). The current research is an attempt to shed some light on the complex reasons for educational achievement among Māori in mainstream secondary schooling. This project also aims to identify what may be necessary to change the environment of mainstream schooling. This is with a view to supporting Māori in continuing to negotiate towards bicultural education for their children and generations to come.

Kim Marie Southey was the 2002 recipient of the Society's *President's Scholarship*, offered annually to Maori post-graduate students undertaking research towards a Masters or higher-level degree in Psychology. Publication in *The Bulletin* of a summary of the relevant research is a condition of the Scholarship, as is presentation of a paper at the Society's Annual Conference following the year of the award. Kim will present her paper in Palmerston North, on 1st September 2003.

## Conceptual Framework

The initial conceptual framework used to create the research question was based on the model of Intergenerational Post-Colonial Stress Disorder (PCSD) (Duran and Duran, 1995). It was initially used to attempt to explain two main issues for Māori within mainstream education. The first issue addresses the education gap between Māori and non-Māori. The second issue targets the degree to which generations of Māori internalized and passed on the oppressive view that Māori are not able to achieve in education.

continues over page

- a panel discussion at Annual Conference
- expansion of the cultural supervision training programme. Feedback from the Cultural Supervision workshops held in 2002 indicated that these played a useful role in building cultural awareness. The new Code of Ethics also highlights these issues.

The Executive intends to consider whether any structural changes are needed.

### Measuring progress

The Executive is conscious of the need to monitor progress through regular

evaluation. Funding would need to be made available for this to be undertaken formally on a more regular basis, but the Executive also intends to monitor progress at its regular meetings.

### Role of NSCBI

Recently the NSCBI has reflected on its purpose and through strategic planning prioritised areas in which members felt it was important to focus for the next couple of years. The Executive has acknowledged the significant workload of the NSCBI and the Committee wants to avoid members feeling overburdened as they deal increasingly with requests for

assistance, advice and suchlike – all voluntary.

The decision made by NSCBI not to respond to every request will mean that in future responsibility for responses will rest with the Executive Director and on other members of the Executive. NSCBI are hoping that this will encourage the Executive to take up collective responsibility for the direction of the Society with regards to further implementing Rule 3. As David and Yoke Leng Thomas point out in their Bicultural Audit report (2003), the Society has made some progress to this end, but there is much work still to be done.



The model proved problematic for reasons primarily linked to the definition of achievement (i.e. Accounting for ethnocentrism and dominance in assumed normative ideologies) and to defining Māori behaviour as a disorder. In short, Māori behaviour, shaped by oppression, was expressed as pathology.

A new conceptual basis has emerged following Guerin's (2003) suggestion for a repositioning of all colonized or oppressed populations. This repositioning is in relation to how they are analyzed in research and how the populations' behaviour is assigned causality. Guerin (2003) explains how often, "characteristics shaped by being colonized or oppressed were ossified into characteristics or attributions about the group itself rather than its' history". Utilizing the former conceptual framework of PCSO, as a sole basis for enquiry meant that the current research was in line for perpetuating this type of contextually intolerant analysis. In the initial framework, the mainstream education system was held as a constant and stable variable. In addition to this was the attributing of success to academic achievement. This left only the 'behaviour' and 'characteristics' of Māori whanau to be questioned and labeled.

Refraining from the usage of labels and assumed characteristics has been important in attempting to produce a truly effective piece of post-colonial inquiry. The path for analysis is cleared to allow for considerations of the complexities that arise from generational change in populations experiencing much historical disruption. Therefore, rather than stating that Māori are 'not achieving', the research will explore the complexities of indigenous intergenerational investment in a system that remains largely monocultural. How Māori have experienced, negotiated, defined and conceptualized their place in mainstream education, and subsequent achievement, is of analytical interest.

### Preliminary Findings

Preliminary findings suggest that whanau have a vested interest in their children attaining qualifications. Grandparents and parents in general see education as an intrinsic right for their children and a path by which children will be able to enter further education or enter (on more equal terms) the labour market. Findings also show that grandparents and parents recognize how the education system's provision of education for Māori in general can affect their child's' experience and performance at school. This recognition has also shown to lead to a more complicated situation of negotiation for grandparents and parents. Some have found themselves acting as a support base for the child against a sometimes hostile school environment whilst still motivating the child to achieve in that environment.

Academic achievement in general seems to have become more of an expectation for children currently attending high school than it was for earlier generations. Reasons given for this include the expectation for earlier generation to enter the labour market and the different structure of exams and qualifications that were offered in past schooling. Earlier generations do not attribute the tendency to leave school early or investment in academic achievement to ethnicity. They do however, acknowledge that Māori were not necessarily seen as candidates for university entrance exams. Earlier generations are able to more readily recognize discrimination in schooling that will impact on Māori children today. Children are also able to more freely discuss this discrimination and have their concerns taken more seriously than earlier generations may have from their parents.

Children who are currently attending high school tend to have a general view and description of Māori students as being those that are more

likely to fail. They do not however, necessarily internalize this view. This therefore creates a paradox between a general internalized oppression of Māori and a personal internalized oppression. This paradox may be related to the highly positive and optimistic messages that children are getting from earlier generations of whanau in relation to their personal abilities. In general, there is a clear indication that whanau recognize the need for change within the schools that they send their children to as opposed to totally focussing on changing the children themselves.

### Conclusion

There are many and varied reasons for the current 'achievement' status of Māori at secondary school. The analysis of history and context that is connected to this status of achievement should not be underdone in research. Generations of Māori come together in this study and show that messages of achievement have always existed. It is the aims and goals that whanau have sought education for that are changing and this is complemented by a more rigorous appreciation of the impact of schooling environments.

### References

- Duran, E. & Duran, B. (1995) *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*. Albany: State University Press.
- Else, A. (1997) *Maori participation and performance in education: A literature review and research programme*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Guerin, B. (2003) *The Subtle Legacies of Colonialism and Oppression: Social and historical contexts of contemporary non-dominant groups*. Hamilton: University of Waikato, pg45.
- McKinley, S. (2000) *Maori Parents and Education: Ko nga Matua Māori me te Mātauranga*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Education Research.

