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**Out of Sight, Out of Mind:
Truancy, through the lens of five Māori 'Truants'.**

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Abstract

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Truancy, through the lens of five Māori 'Truants'.

"But I feel sorry for our kids, because I know once they get outside the gates, a lot of [teachers] are saying.... "Out of sight, out of mind- they're not my problem". And then, the next group- they're complaining or handing out statistics of how many Māori people are in institutions" (Simon, 1993, p. 21)

Defining the cause and solutions as to why Māori students truant by non-Māori definitions can be problematic, especially if it creates a profile based on stereotypes and assumptions. It is likely that truants and their backgrounds are viewed as culturally deficient, socially inept and intellectually ignorant about the value of education. Furthermore, truancy linked to 'at risk' youth, creates discourse not only about the 'truant', but also about their families. Such discourse might construct them as also being "abnormally integrated, socially irresponsible and morally defective (Jacka, Sutherland, Peters & Smith, 1997:10). Current literature provides definitions of truancy and descriptions of a culture of schooling, where some students have found it very difficult to 'fit'. For those who do find space in the classroom, it can come at a cost.

'Out of Sight, Out of Mind' examines truancy, through the lens of five Māori students in order to provide some understanding of some of the causes behind this social phenomenon. It is anticipated that the results of this study will contribute to more positive outcomes on education for Māori students in the mainstream education system. Interviews with a small group of Māori students and their parents, reveal their experiences in mainstream schooling, and identify areas of concern that escalated into their student's decision to withdraw from school. Initially, withdrawals were from individual lessons or subjects, escalating into withdrawing for whole days at a time.

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I dedicate this document to your memories:

William Edward White (April 25th 2000)

Donald McCallum Miller (December 21st 2005)

PREFACE

In the late 1970's, I was a second year fifth form student, which was the classification then given to students who did not pass the National School Certificate examination in their fifth form year. I found that I had created my own school timetable regime, where I spent more time out of the classroom, than inside it. I was absent so often that a teacher commented that he was surprised I was not hospitalised, given the number of days I was supposedly sick at home. However, I was not sick, nor was I at home, but because I was not in the classroom during the official school hours, I was classified as a truant. I did not need to be coerced by my peers to absent myself from class. Nor did I plan what I would do with the extra time. I neither knew what I was going to do nor where I was going to go; I only knew where I didn't want to be. Initially, I attended school every day and sat amongst others just like me, while being constantly reminded, either directly through classroom practices or indirectly, through hidden curriculum and institutional policies and practices, that the meritocratic equation (ability + effort = reward) (Marshall, 1988) was not a myth and I was evidence of that. Meritocracy as an aim of education was used internationally (Darder, 1991) and in most New Zealand schools (Coxon, Jenkins, Marshall & Massey, 1994). Education was to be made "*accessible to all, in such a way that differences in achievement and reward would be perceived as the outcomes of differences in the abilities and efforts of individuals*" (Ibid, p. 48). What was often not acknowledged within the dynamics of student success or failure were the uneven power relations determined by cultural and economic forces that advantage students from the dominant culture (Ibid). So meritocracy reinforced the assumption that those who were second year 'anything' repeated their second year due to lack of ability, lack of effort or a combination of the two. The stigma and negative treatment associated with being a 'second year fifth', along with many other Māori and students from Pacific Nations was so strong that it seemed to me that if there was a choice, truancy was the only sensible option. So as a past truant and more recently, the parent of a truant, trying to make sense of why and how truancy still exists is an interesting yet very complex issue. Through my experiences, and having my own story to tell, I hear my story resonating through the lived experiences of others, and working in the educational context, I continue to read about, hear from and speak to many others who tell those same

stories; stories that have been retold year after year- same tale, different teller, different time.

So what is that story and who is telling it?