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“They didn’t care about normal kids like me”

Restructuring a school to fit the kids



“Nga Hau e Wha” by Chey Milne

A thesis submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Educational Administration, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Ann Milne

2004

Declaration

I declare that this thesis, "They didn't care about normal kids like me" - Restructuring a school to fit the kids, represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

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28.01.04

For the kids ...

*For my grandchildren, Chey, Blake, Georgia, Kairangi, Koha,
Kaya, Zion, Maicha and Mahina, who keep reminding me how
important it is to be Maori everywhere in their lives*



*For the kids at Clover Park Middle School
who show us the way to our future*

Abstract

Towards the end of 2000 a group of young Maori, formerly students in Clover Park Middle School's bilingual unit up to Year 9 or 10, approached the school to ask if they could return to the Maori learning environment where they felt they had been successful. They reported they had been unable to feel this way again in any of their respective senior secondary school settings. In the process of explaining why he felt he hadn't fitted into his school, one young man said, "They didn't care about normal kids like me." For him, being Maori was "normal" and he didn't see anything in his senior secondary schooling experience that valued his reality. This study aimed to answer five questions that arose from this student's statement:

1. Why *don't* schools fit the kids?
2. How *could* schools fit the kids?
3. How *has Clover Park Middle School made changes* to fit the kids?
4. *Does* Clover Park Middle School fit the kids?
5. How *could other schools* fit the kids?

Clover Park Middle School is situated in Otara, in Manukau City, New Zealand. In 2003, 99% of the school's 325 students were of Maori or Pacific heritage. Originally a traditional Years 7 and 8 intermediate school, Clover Park was granted official middle school status in 1995 allowing the extension to a four year span from Years 7 to 10. Hand in hand with this restructuring has been a transformation of the school's internal organisation and philosophy, initially to respond to demands from Maori parents for bilingual and whanau-based education from 1986 to 1992, and then gaining impetus into whole school change since 1994.

The methodology chosen for this study is within the naturalistic paradigm. Specifically the research design is an intrinsic case study informed by kaupapa Maori and critical race theory. These theories put the issues of race and power at the centre of the research and ask important questions about the control and production of knowledge. Questions such as these are crucial in the story of a school that has tried hard to break away from the status quo and challenge racism in our education system. The purpose of intrinsic case study is to tell the story "as is" because "in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest" Stake (2000, p.437). This was the intention of this research.

A wide range of literature presented in Chapter 2 confirms that the alienation of indigenous and ethnic minority students from mainstream school systems is endemic both in New Zealand and internationally. These communities share a history of disempowerment that is perpetuated by the pervasive white lens through which our education systems structure and view learning.

In order to empower indigenous and ethnic minority students to challenge existing school structures to make learning more relevant and accessible it will be necessary for this lens to

change and for interdependent lenses of equal status to be created. Changing the lens and then restructuring the school to fit this new view has resulted in changes to learning contexts and curriculum approach to provide a culturally relevant learning environment.

Clover Park Middle School's *power lenses* connect students' relationships to themselves, to their cultures, to each other, to their wider whanau, their community, the world and to learning in all of those spheres. The key is whanaungatanga - the interdependence of and *connectedness* to a network that will continue to support them and connect them to their futures. They in turn will maintain that connection and continue to contribute to the whanau network. This is empowerment.

Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Declaration	i
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vii
List of Figures.....	xii
List of Photographs	xv
<i>Chapter 1</i>	1
Introduction	1
Research Problem.....	2
“They didn’t care about normal kids like me.”	2
Research Questions	3
Research Site	4
Research Issues.....	6
Thesis Outline	7
Chapter One: Introduction	7
<i>Schools don’t fit the kids: “They didn’t care about normal kids like me”</i>	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	7
<i>Why don’t schools fit the kids? How could schools fit the kids?</i>	7
Chapter Three: Methodology	7
Chapter Four: Clover Park Middle School: The Journey.....	8
<i>How does Clover Park Middle School fit the kids?</i>	8
Chapter Five: Evidence of Effectiveness	8
<i>Does Clover Park Middle School fit the kids?</i>	8
Chapter Six: A Shorter Journey	8
<i>Chapter 2</i>	9
Literature Review	9
Why <i>don’t</i> schools fit the kids?	9
Colonisation and Assimilation	10
Disparity, Alienation and Marginalisation	14
<i>The Realities</i>	14
<i>The Reasons</i>	19
Globalisation	23
Defining achievement and success	25

Multicultural Education	28
School Practice in New Zealand	31
<i>Educational Reforms: Tomorrow's Schools</i>	33
<i>Equity and Choice</i>	34
<i>The Reforms and Educational Outcomes</i>	36
<i>The Rhetoric of Multiculturalism and Diversity</i>	36
Maori Education	41
<i>Deficits, deficits and deficits still</i>	42
<i>Taha Maori</i>	44
<i>Bilingual Education</i>	45
<i>Maori initiatives</i>	46
Pacific Education.....	46
How <i>could</i> schools fit the kids?	50
Beyond Multicultural Education: Power and Pedagogy.....	50
Critical Multiculturalism	52
Critical Pedagogy.....	53
Critical Race Theory	54
Antiracist Education	55
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy	56
Culture Counts: Ways forward in New Zealand classrooms.....	59
Curriculum	62
Schools that <i>do</i> fit the kids.....	68
Navajo	68
Richmond Road	69
Kura Kaupapa Maori.....	72
Middle Schooling	75
<i>Middle Schooling in New Zealand</i>	79
Conclusion.....	82
Chapter 3	83
Methodology	83
Research site	83
Research design	83
Intrinsic Case Study.....	85
Kaupapa Maori and Critical Race Theory	85
Ethical considerations.....	90
Data collection and analysis	92

Availability	92
Collection and collation of data	93
Analysis and Trustworthiness	96
Chapter 4.....	100
Clover Park Middle School.....	100
The Journey	100
<i>How has Clover Park Middle School made changes to fit the kids?</i>	100
Otara	101
Education in Otara	106
Maori Language	107
Pacific Languages	111
Clover Park Intermediate School, 1981 - 1982: The Journey Begins	113
School Design	117
1983: Recollections	119
1986 - 1993: Te Whanau o Tupuranga	120
Taha Maori Unit 1986 - 1987	120
Bilingual Unit 1988	126
1990: Forms Three and Four	129
1991: Lumanai - Samoan Bilingual Unit	133
1994 - Leadership	135
Restructuring: External and Internal Change	137
1995: Clover Park Middle School - Change of Status	138
Restructuring for cultural relevance.....	143
Reculturing	145
Whanaungatanga	149
1996: Ministry of Education Initiatives	153
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy at Clover Park Middle School	159
Team Teaching	161
Organisation.....	163
Staffing.....	165
Learning.....	166
Curriculum Integration	167
Reciprocal relationships with the community.....	170
<i>Te Poho</i>	171
Appreciative Inquiry	173
Kia Aroha Marae	177

Cultural Performance / Celebration Day.....	179
Conclusion	181
Chapter 5.....	185
Evidence of Effectiveness	185
Does Clover Park Middle School fit the kids?	185
Themes	187
Theme One: Whanaungatanga	188
<i>School documentation</i>	188
<i>Independent documentation</i>	188
<i>Students / Staff perceptions</i>	189
Theme Two: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	190
<i>School documentation</i>	190
<i>Independent documentation</i>	190
<i>Students / Staff perceptions</i>	191
Theme Three: Middle Schooling	193
<i>School documentation</i>	193
<i>Independent documentation</i>	194
<i>Students / Staff perceptions</i>	194
Theme Four: Curriculum Approach	195
<i>School documentation</i>	196
<i>Independent documentation</i>	196
<i>Students / Staff perceptions</i>	197
All themes: Community perceptions.....	199
Conclusion.....	200
Chapter 6.....	201
A Shorter Journey	201
The Senior Class.....	201
Senior Class Achievement.....	209
Conclusion / Discussion: How <i>could other schools</i> fit the kids?	212
Academic hegemony.....	212
Changing the lens	214
Implications / Future research	223
Future Research	224
Does Clover Park Middle School fit the kids?	225

Glossary	226
Maori	226
Other Languages.....	227
List of Appendices	228
Appendix A	229
Appendix B	231
Appendix C	234
Appendix D	235
Appendix E	238
Appendix F	240
References	243
Index	264

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: United States of America Dropout rates of 16 - 24 year-olds by ethnicity: 1972 to 2000.	15
Figure 2.2: Canada: Highest Level of Attainment by Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal populations, 1986 and 1996.	16
Figure 2.3: Australia: Retention Rates for Years 10, 11 and 12. 2001	16
Figure 2.4: Qualifications for Indigenous peoples aged 15 years and over - Australia and New Zealand, 1996	17
Figure 2.5: United States of America: Projected Population by Ethnicity, 1998 - 2050	24
Figure 2.6: A map of possible reasons for not providing answers to outsiders' questions	28
Figure 2.7: New Zealand Schools	31
Figure 2.8: School Leavers: Percentage Gaining 6th Form Certificate# or Higher (or NQF Equivalent) 1993 to 2001	36
Figure 2.9: A model of the cumulative development of cultural superiority: the hegemonic cycle	41
Figure 2.10: Influences on Maori achievement as identified in the discourses	43
Figure 2.11: Three steps for teachers to increase cross-cultural competence	60
Figure 2.12: Defining Curriculum	63
Figure 2.13: National Middle School Association: Core Beliefs	76
Figure 2.14: Overall Quality of Education of Years 9 and 10	81
Figure 3.1: Research Overview	84
Figure 3.2: Evaluation Model: Research in Maori contexts.	86
Figure 3.3. The use of whanau metaphors in education contexts.	89
Figure 3.4: Example of External Data Tree	94
Figure 3.5: Example of Internal Data Tree	94
Figure 3.6: Example of theme creation	95
Figure 3.7: Research spiral	98
Figure 4.1: Otara Population Change by Ethnicity 1986 - 2001	102
Figure 4.2: Analysis of the total Maori school student roll in Otara: 2002	108
Figure 4.3: Otara Schools, Primary, Intermediate and Middle: Maori Language Funding 2002	110
Figure 4.4: Maori Language speaking distribution - Auckland-wide and in Otara: 2001	111
Figure 4.5: Proportion of ethnic groups in Manukau City (1996 Census) who can converse only in English (top), and only in community language (bottom), by 10-year age groups	112
Figure 4.6: Programme for the Official Opening of Clover Park Intermediate School	114
Figure 4.7: Clover Park Intermediate School Roll by Ethnicity, June 1981 and 1982	116

Figure 4.8: Letter from District Senior Inspector of Primary Schools, Department of Education, 25 February, 1986	122
Figure 4.9: Tupuranga symbol	1
Figure 4.10: Professional development and change spiral	146
Figure 4.11: Open Plan Teaching Areas	160
Figure 4.12: New Zealand Curriculum Levels	163
Figure 4.13: Curriculum Integration Continuum	168
Figure 4.14: Example of Curriculum Integration Inquiry using student questions: Tupuranga 2003	170
Figure 4.15: Timeline, Clover Park Middle School: 1981 to 2003	183
Figure 5.1: Clover Park Middle School philosophy and practice	185
Figure 5.2: Documentation involved in evidential searches	187
Figure 6.1: Achievement	213
Figure 6.2: Power Lenses: Clover Park Middle School 2003	215
Figure 6.3: Power Lenses: Linked to culturally relevant pedagogy	218
Figure 6.4: Levels of Relationship	219
Figure 6.5: Power Lenses of the senior students, 2003	222

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Maori involvement in education, July 2000	17
Table 2.2: Proportion of 2001 School Leavers by Highest Attainment and Ethnicity	18
Table 2.3: Alienation of Maori students 1999/2000	18
Table 2.4: Priorities for In-Service Training 2000	38
Table 2.5: Engagement in Maori Language Learning, 1987-9 and 2001	45
Table 2.6: Number of students attending schools by ethnicity and socio-economic status, July 2002.	47
Table 2.7: Number of schools and students involved in Pacific-medium Education in 2001	47
Table 2.8: Antiracist Education	55
Table 2.9: Evaluating Power Imbalances in the Classroom.	59
Table 2.10: Pedagogical Strategies	65
Table 3.1: Data available for this research	93
Table 4.1: Otara School Types	103
Table 4.2: Otara Education Qualifications	105
Table 4.3: Maori Language Funding for 2004	107
Table 4.4: Te Whanau o Tupuranga Treaty of Waitangi Checklist	128
Table 4.5: The situation in 1994	136
Table 4.6: Fit between Middle School philosophy and Maori parents' aspirations	143
Table 4.7: Practical examples of the change spiral	147
Table 4.8: Barriers to change	152
Table 4.9: Clover Park Middle School Roll, 2003: by Ethnicity	164
Table 4.10: Ethnicity of Clover Park Middle School staff: January, 2004	165
Table 4.11: Traditional Process vs. Appreciative Inquiry	173
Table 4.12: Outcomes of Te Poho	176
Table 5.1: Consistency of all four themes in official school documents	188
Table 5.2: Coded references to Middle Schooling in official school documents	193
Table 6.1: 2001 Clover Park Senior Class results against School Leavers by Highest Attainment and Ethnicity	210

List of Photographs

Photograph 4.1: Clover Park Middle School 2002	159
Photograph 4.2: Open Plan Teaching Area: Lumanai	161
Photograph 4.3: Inside the Wharenui, Kia Aroha Marae	178