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Title:

Pedagogical Decolonization: Impacts of the European/Pākehā society on the education of Tongan people in Aotearoa-New Zealand

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Abstract

This paper is an invitation to engage critically in the discussion of *indigenous* languages and cultures, and the implications for pedagogical decolonisation. Among the issues raised are questions of the impacts of the beliefs, values and attitudes of the prevailing Anglo Saxon and Christian culture or New Zealand European/Pākehā society upon the aspirations and education of Tongan students in the secondary sector of the Education system. Therefore, the paper draws attention to the social and cultural contestations in affirming the place of Tongan people in secondary schooling in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

A Suburban Socio-Cultural Place

Tongan and Maori students experience the full range of cultural domination by the hegemonic European approach toward education and its reporting in the media. The idea for this paper arose from a column entitled “Culture disrupts schooling” in a suburban newspaper. In the column, the issues and concerns of the Chairperson of the Auckland Secondary Schools Principals Association (ASSPA) about the students who take part in the ASB Secondary Schools *Māori* and Pacific Islands Cultural Festival are emphasized. Since its inception in 1976 the Festival has produced claims from the principals, among others which *distort*, *devalue*, and *disrupt* the language and culture of *indigenous* students. Even though, the students practice their dances and songs after school hours, during the lunch break and the weekend, claims by the principals that the “students spend too much class time practising for cultural performances” and that “rehearsals for the event are disruptive” and “effect their schooling” continue to be produced by them.

The ASSPA's actions and dominant perspectives are deflating and discouraging to Māori and Tongan people who have to struggle with a lack of respect and support for their

cultural practices. There is something a bit deflating about the ASSPA's picture. The Principals present a monotonous criticism of *Māori* and Pacific Islands peoples, and our languages and cultures. The criticism can be deflected however by an *indigenous* critique of their conception that *Māori* and Pacific "culture disrupts schooling" for our students. The terminology *indigenous* refers to those *Māori* people from *Aotearoa*-New Zealand and the immigrants and their offspring from the Kingdom of *Tonga* whose body and soul, languages and cultures have been distorted, devalued and disrupted by the prevailing Anglo Saxon and Christian culture in *Aotearoa*-New Zealand over generations.

The paper is grounded in the work by the *indigenous Māori* and the *indigenous Tongan* teachers from 1991-1995 in the Mt Roskill Grammar School, Auckland city, so ways of understanding the term *indigenous* are discussed first. The next section queries the social capacity of schooling in terms of the important concepts of 'culture'. Finally, the framework called *PōTalanōa* will be discussed. The central thesis is that schooling ought to be a partnership in which both the prevailing New Zealand European/Pākehā and *indigenous* peoples, aware and proud of our own languages and cultural practices, represent the force for creating a richer pedagogical environment. The words distort, devalue, and disrupt are highlighted in the second paragraph because they are important in understanding the position taken in this article. Thus, the view is that schooling is a political act not a neutral one.

PōTalanōa: A Tongan Concept

The most crucial impacts raised here are that of the relation of schooling to the social and cultural forces inside and outside school, the relations of *indigenous* students to their own community and environment. Thus, two sides of one question are discussed: how the ASSPA protects and supports the relationship of schools in shaping society and culture, and how the ASSPA and schooling can be infused with new insights, concepts, philosophies and approaches through practices that include cultural relationships. In doing so, a conceptual framework called *PōTalanōa* that is empowering and gratifying to *indigenous* peoples is presented. That is, a framework that does not limit *indigenous* peoples' capacity to understand the complexity and richness of the *indigenous* cultural milieu will be posited. It is a framework enabling *indigenous* peoples to understand the relationship of schooling in promoting and hindering the development of internal strength, 'feeling at home' within the educational environment, and the capacity to transform social and cultural

relationships that reflect the ideas, perspectives, interests, and activities of the ASSPA.

Localising and 'Internationalizing' *Indigenous Peoples*

From the outset, it is important to shed light on how the term *indigenous* is appropriated in the article in order to understand the relations of *indigenous* students to his or her community and environment. On 12 February 1840 and six days after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between several of the *indigenous* Māori tribes and the representatives of Queen Victoria of England the venerable Chief, Mohi Tawhai offered the following warning on the relationship:

"Let the tongue of everyone be free to speak, but what of it. What will be the end? Our sayings will sink to the bottom like a stone, but your sayings will float light like the wood of the whau tree and always remain to be seen. Am I telling lies?" (Chief Mohi Tawhai, Hokianga, Northland, New Zealand, 1840)

One hundred and fifty-nine years later in the text *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Linda Smith has argued that the term *indigenous* is a relatively recent one and it 'internationalises' the ordeals and the problems of some of the world's *colonized* people.¹ In an attempt to avoid collectivizing the many distinct societies whose mind, spirit, and body have been disrupted by a colonizing society, the term is used here to refer specifically to *Māori* who have been subjected to settlement of the mind, body, spirit, and land by a colonizing society in *Aotearoa*-New Zealand. Also, the term can refer to the migrants and their descendants from the Kingdom of Tonga whose specific way of thinking and quality of life are shaped by a colonizing society, even after it has left the tropical islands to the north of *Aotearoa*-New Zealand. Of course, *Māori* and *Tongan* people cannot escape from their own languages, assumptions, histories, sacred traditions, sacred ceremonies, ancestors, kin affiliations, beliefs, values, responsibilities, obligations, and challenges.

The connections and interactions between the mind, spirit, and body play an important part in understanding the term *indigenous*. The mind refers to the 'mindscape' or ways of thinking about people and kin relations based on common descent, and place which includes sacred dwellings, sacred mountains, sacred waterways, sacred sites, and so forth.² The spirit is related to the most deep passions for ancestors and deities in whom a person believes, values, dreams about, and to whom we are committed. The body, in turn, is connected with the person's decisions and activities. *Indigenously* the term can be characterized by the balance of the body, mind, and spirit; relationships and renewal; acknowledgement of the ancestors, spirits, or, deities that activate the world around them. From this point of view, *indigeneity* is coming to understand that all life is living and filled with meaning.

It is instructive to note that it might be considered odd by some fourth, fifth, and sixth generation New Zealand European/*Pākehā* people to envision *Tongan* migrants as *indigenous* people in *Aotearoa*-New Zealand. Therefore let us turn to the important contribution of linguistics to clarify the idea.³ While *Māori* culture was produced in *Aotearoa* and most of what *Māori* believed about their changed lived experience was *indigenous* knowledge formed in *Aotearoa* their language had no contact with other languages because these first settlers remained isolated from their island homeland (meaning region) in the Pacific Ocean for centuries. It is not a matter of geographical distance that is important to understanding how the term *indigenous* is used here, but, the idea that *Tongan* and *Māori* (among others) descend from a common linguistic ancestor. That is, the languages belong to the same subgroup of Austronesian, in this case Polynesian. In addition, the traditional stories that *Māori*, as descendants of the first people of *Aotearoa* are known, brought with them are the same as those told in *Tonga*, for example. The idea that languages change is in itself neither particularly remarkable nor useful to this discussion. The interest lies in the notion that the ubiquitous and powerful influence promoted by perceptions of cultural rupture signal that *Māori* and *Tongan* peoples' knowledge of songs, poetry, and dance: and the peoples' conceptual and linguistic ways of

organizing knowledge remain in danger of being *disrupted* on stage and in school. Thus, the suggestion is that it is the impacts of *disruption* on Tongan and Māori language, literature, dance, song and ceremonial drama that internationalises the indigenous relationship between them (Kēpa, 2001).

This also brings up the problem: What shall New Zealand European/*Pākehā* people who might legitimately want to claim some kind of *indigenous* status in New Zealand be called? As Smith puts it, the term has been co-opted politically by descendants of European settlers who lay claim to an *indigenous* identity through their occupation and settlement of land over several generations or simply through being born in New Zealand. This conveys some sense of people who belong to the country but they tend not to actively struggle as a society for the protection of *Māori* and *Tongan* languages, knowledges, and cultures or, support the self-determination of *Māori* whose forbears once occupied the land they have settled. New Zealand European/*Pākehā* people's linguistic and cultural homeland is somewhere else; their cultural loyalty is to some other place, the United Kingdom, for example. They are a reflection of the fact that the first disruptive contacts in *Aotearoa* were with people, generally white men, who subscribed to a fairly uniform set of beliefs about language, society, property, government, and religion passed on through schooling and the work force. This conveys the sense of people who belong to *Aotearoa* but do not share the experiences as people who have been subjected to the disruption of their body, mind, spirit, and land. From this point of view, it is clear that New Zealand European/*Pākehā* people are not considered *indigenous* in this article.

This being the case, culture cannot be more or less the same for everyone because the inevitable selection of knowledge, experiences, and skills for schooling and the work force occurs over a terrain of different people and their places. The point being made is that different people from different places conceptualize culture in different ways. It should be emphasized that the term is problematic, complex but irreplaceable to a discussion of performing arts, schooling, and cultural diversity. In the interests of conceptual clarity and to diminish the risk of misunderstandings, the

critical ideas of Thomas J. Sergiovanni, Paulo Freire, Maria de la Luz Reyes, and Alison Jones; *Ana Maui Taufē'ulungaki, Kabini Sanga, Manu Aluli Meyer, Konai Helu Thaman*, among other *indigenous* educators, are drawn upon to shed light on what culture can and ought to mean in school.⁴

Impacts of the Beliefs, Values & Attitudes of the Prevailing European/Pākehā Society

In discussing how the ASSPA protects and supports the relationship of schools in shaping culture and politics, it is worth referring to the ideas depicted in Thomas J. Sergiovanni's text, *Moral Leadership*.⁵ According to Sergiovanni, the 'managerial mystique' represents the dominant 'world view' of management theory and practice and is reflected in the curricula of schooling, among other institutions. For the most part, the managerial mystique is biased toward rationality, logic, neutrality, the importance of self-interest, individualism, a notion of time as linear, sequential and irreversible, and assimilation. Emphasizing these values means dismissing emotions, passions, and morality; devaluing the importance of group membership and a sense of belonging to a place; distorting the notion of time as part of the whole environment of living; disrupting the languages, responsibilities and obligations of the *indigenous* milieu as important qualities. There is a tendency then to focus knowledge, attention, and skills so narrowly that principals and teachers have become incapable of thinking and acting beyond prescribed information, skills and roles.

Maria de a Lu Reyes challenges widely accepted assumptions that undergird and guide schooling for linguistically different students in her claim that the practice is:

"similar to the 'one size fits all' marketing concept that would have buyers believe that there is an average or ideal size among men and women Those who market 'one size fits all' products suggest that if the article of clothing is

not a good fit, the fault is not with the design of the garment, but with those who are too fat, too skinny, too tall, too short, or too high-waisted".⁶

Alison Jones' work comparing *Pālangi* and 'Pacific' female students in a secondary school in Auckland city puts the notion of *disruption* or exclusion in the following way:

"School success is not a result of cultural differences as such, but is a result of the way in which schools unconsciously make familiarity with the dominant culture a prerequisite for school success The values, ideas, ways of thinking and acting which children in dominant cultural groups learn through their socialization in the family are converted into valuable school credentials by the school".⁷

Colin Lankshear's work throws further light on exclusionary practices in schooling. He observed that:

"The only 'reason' I can see for requiring migrant children to be taught and examined in English is in order to Anglicise, uniformise or domesticate them. This is a political act that disempowers and disadvantages those who are 'other'. It is to privilege sameness over difference. As far as I am concerned, this is to dehumanize others. It also makes a society less interesting to live in".⁸

It should go without saying that the same assumption holds for *Māori*. On these versions of schooling then the venerable assumption is that approaches to learning and teaching deemed effective for students familiar with the dominant New Zealand European/ *Pākehā* culture will foster all students' schooling no matter what their language and culture may be. The real significance of this posture, though, has more to do with what it excludes than what it includes. That is, schooling does not simply provide knowledge (meaning accumulated experiences); rather, it dismisses one kind of knowledge for another in the context of a power relationship. Power, in this sense, is almost characterized by what is excluded.

If Maria de la Luz Reyes, Thomas. J. Sergiovanni, Alison Jones, Colin Lankshear, and the other critical theorists are accurate in their portrait of schooling then educational activity has some way to go before the *indigenous* peoples can be confident that the prevailing approaches to teaching practice are well-considered and, principals and teachers are able to think beyond the boundaries of “generic teaching methods”.⁹ The danger for the *indigenous* students in the preference for the ‘methods fetish’ in secondary schooling is that the ASSPA has come to believe that there is one way of understanding conditions of education, one valid methodology and one valid policy of knowing about how people relate to schooling (Kēpa, 2001).

What seems to be happening in the ASSPA is that the principals’ lack of conceptual clarity has led to their confused understanding of the term culture. This has influenced how schooling issues, particularly those cultural relations of *indigenous* peoples, are approached. By assuming that a fixed and static set of beliefs about language, society, property, government, and religion passed on through schooling are shared understandings of the term, the ASSPA has run the risk of ‘talking past’ *indigenous* peoples without realizing it. Thus, a clear distinction needs to be made between the people whose culture is disrupted and those who participate more or less unobstructed in *Aotearoa*.¹⁰ As previously mentioned, the former group is constituted principally of the *indigenous* people from *Aotearoa* and *Tonga*, among other migrants from the Pacific Islands cultural milieu. They are the communities whose position has been established historically through military conquest, or social, or economic, and/or political disruption. The important ideas are that the communities whose specific language and culture are devalued in school are situated in the lowest position in the social, economic and political hierarchy and are severely discriminated against. Those who participate more or less unobstructed would include the professional and managerial middle class, such as the ASSPA, whose English language and its attendant values, ideas, ways of doing things prevail in secondary schooling. This being the case, it is clear that culture

symbolizes the tenuous relationship *indigenous* students have in school. It seems reasonable to suggest then that the ASSPA plays an active role in shaping what happens in schooling. This means that schooling is not neutral. From this point of view, it appears obvious that the dominant 'culture disrupts schooling' for the *indigenous Māori and Tongan* students (Kēpa, 2001).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire posits that the anthropological concept of culture is central and indispensable to the education of people in their coming to know about the world.¹¹ In his view, the concept of culture as an educational theme generates and brings forth peoples' awareness of the world of culture and the many aspects of realities that touch their lives. Freire does not attempt to define culture specifically. The assumption is that he seeks not to limit the frame of discussion by defining culture in some static sense; rather the idea is to allow people to draw upon their own knowledge and experiences as culture that constitutes the way they think, act and live. For example, it is through dialogue and community participation that *indigenous* peoples come to understand how their knowledges and experiences are produced and how to transform the marginalized social situation in which they are positioned.

As Freire puts it:

"... culture clarifies the role of people in the world and with the world as transforming rather than adaptive beings".¹²

On Freire's view of culture as transformative action, it would appear that educative practice to mitigate against the beliefs of institutionalized discrimination, marginal status, and cultural rupture requires a holistic approach on stage, in the class and school. Freire would argue that the beginning for any educative programme is the students' own language and culture. Yet, Freire is well aware that this initial part of a process for establishing an awareness of a person's culture also means that the students are required to learn the language and culture of the school. His work, while not without its flaws, provides important signposts for *indigenous*

communities seeking to engage in political action for curtailing exclusionary practices. This is the transformation that Paulo Freire wrote of in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a transformation in educative practice that seeks not only to liberate the oppressed, but the oppressors as well: an empowerment struggle led by a vision of humanity that supports *indigeneity* and diversity, and increase in power through genuine dialogue and community participation. On this account, it is clear that Paulo Freire's philosophy and practice would provide *indigenous* peoples with ways of working against disruptive practices in an effort to go beyond the 'theoretical straitjacket' of cultural and political uniformity.

In drawing a parallel with Freire, an *indigenous* concept of culture would provide a way of apprehending the world as process embodying broad vision, wide interests, and sufficient ability to carry out many responsibilities in daily practice including producing an understanding of cultural, political, economic, and educative activities, and taking action against the oppressive forces of reality. Conceptualizing culture in this way means retrieving the 'old' so as to understand what is 'new' and to make changes whenever possible. Indeed beliefs, customs, traditions and so forth, differ between the past and present. Old and new ways are lived differently. On this conception, culture refers to the legacies related to the past and is vitally concerned with the present ways of living, and the future. More to the point, it is through interweaving the lived realities of ancestors and older adults; and personal present lived experience that *indigenous* peoples acquire understandings of themselves, thereby bringing them authority to critique the disruption of our particular language and culture. Conceiving of culture as interweaving the past and present lived experience means that an *indigenous* understanding of time is not linear, independent and irreversible; rather, time is understood as part of the entire environment of living, including the past and the future. The conception accentuates that what is required is not further disruption of *indigenous* cultural practices but a reconnection of time and people, the inclusion of personal history in influencing the relationship of the students and the teacher, and curricula that connects with the language of the students' lives. The point is to change the artificial

linear and fragmented notion of time, for the students to make sense of their social and historical situations, to make sense of themselves and ultimately, for illuminating the social and cultural forces that may impinge upon the possibilities for transformative practice on stage and in school.

The imprint of the dominant society and culture, though, is inscribed in a whole range of school practices. The English language, school rules, selection and presentation of school knowledge, classroom social relations, and the exclusion of *indigenous* cultures. What is crucial to recognize is that an *indigenous* concept of culture is an intricate world of knowledge that richly interweaves the English language and its attendant cultural practices with the particular *indigenous* language and its ensuing values, and so forth. The belief is that cultural understandings are preoccupied within the language a person speaks and in turn, this language extends out of the spirits of a place, out of people sustaining life. On this belief, language becomes the rallying point for the intercommunication between history, art, music, education, philosophy, sociology, psychology, economics, law, politics, healing, care for the environment, spirituality and so on. This leads to the view that not only is it impossible to separate people from our relationship to language, place, time, politics, wealth, knowledge, technology, nature, religion, spiritual wisdom, and emotion, it is theoretically dishonest. The point is that *indigenous* ways of talking do not coincide with the linguistic boundaries of English; rather, the idea is that language conveys knowledge of people and place. Consequently, learning is never incomprehensible since it is firmly connected with a person's and entire peoples' concrete existence, in their language and beliefs, and a wider sense of reality. Still in this view, the *indigenous* languages of *Aotearoa* and *Tonga*, for example, are mutually intelligible and the people still have much in common – words, philosophies, and stories. A common feature of the languages is the holistic and process-view of the complex relationships that exist within the cosmos, nature, and society. An important consideration that the ASSPA cannot ignore is that *Māori* and *Tongan* people now communicate with each other using the English language with all its cultural problems for conveying meanings arising out of their specific settings.

It seems reasonable to suggest then that language is at the heart of culture (Kēpa, 2001).

Regardless of the extent of contact with the prevailing culture *indigenous* peoples through their personal experiences are aware and insistent about their own ways of communicating and interacting. The communities are deeply aware of the necessity for schooling that incorporates and stresses their apprehension of their intimate situation. The language of schooling testing, credentials, remediation, and so forth should always be the language in which possibilities for success are greatest and/or in which the student feels most at home. The point being made is that it does not make sense to separate people and place, language and culture, and educational activities into speaking, reading and writing. The aspiration of the people cannot be to learn in a classroom that produces students who could lose their vitality and grounding in their own cultural identity and provide them with a way of knowing associated only with the prevailing society and culture. To approach schooling in this way would be to disrupt learning in their personal and the dominant culture. What is required instead is a devotion to schooling where *Māori* and *Tongan* people, for instance, will have their experiences, values, and ways of communication reflected alongside the officially sanctioned view in the educational environment (Kēpa, 2001).

The critical issue is that *indigenous* experiences contribute valuable insights and different viewpoints from which to draw upon during schooling. Most important, culture's dynamic constitution and its relationship with schooling are both emphasized in an *indigenous* cultural concept. That is, the concept signals a dynamic process where teaching, learning, and the place of learning are all interconnected, familiar, and affirming for the students. Stated in a different way, the ideas for an *indigenous* concept of culture are neither conceptualized nor set in motion in a vacuum; and that culture is neither lifeless nor fixed (Kēpa, 2001).

Of course, how the following generations make sense of the world will not be the same as for their parents or their grandparents. Their experiences, their views, their ways of understanding and acting in the world will be different. So what is passed on to succeeding generations may not be the same. It would seem reasonable to say, though, that so long as the ASSPA perpetuates only the English language, envisions reality as linear, and conceives of time as an independent element that can be manipulated to improve contact time between the students and the teacher and, convey a smooth-running operation of specific prescriptions and methodologies, among other educational outcomes then schooling for the *Māori*, *Tongan* and other Pacific Islands students will continue to be a disruptive force upon them. No matter how well a school is organized, the unexpected and unpredictable take place daily. In the complexity of cultural issues, the ASSAP ought to begin to acknowledge the reality of tensions that result from different languages, interests, values, and practices, from privilege, oppression, and power as they are lived by principals, teachers, and *indigenous* students in class and school. It would seem obvious that the process requires taking into account a dialogue between cultures (Kēpa, 2001).

Pedagogical Decolonization

According to the report in the 'Central Leader':

"the Auckland secondary school principals say students spent too much class time practicing for cultural performances".¹³

Because of their social and cultural supremacy and economic prosperity, the ASSPA has gone on blissfully responding in pessimistic ways to the ASB Bank Festival held each March in the city of Auckland. It is not proposed here that the students stop attending the Festival; rather, the belief is that they should have access to events that offer programmes for their particular culture. Such programmes enrich the students' lives and provide a deeper meaning to all knowledge.

From a *Tongan* point of view, the Festival is probably the only event held in secondary schools when *Tongan* students, their parents and the wider *Tongan* community come together with the ASSPA and teachers for six weeks every year. It is also the setting in which *Tongan* people experience living at the interface of many cultures; that is the school, the ASSPA, *Māori*, *Tongan*, among other cultural communities (Manu`atu, 2000). This cultural interface necessitates questioning how schooling can be infused with innovative insights, perspectives, philosophies, and approaches through practices that traverse social and cultural relationships. Dialogue needs to be promoted between *Tongan* people and the school. Forums of broad vision and wide interests that include *Tongan* people, the principals and teachers, and the Board of Trustees are required to encourage dialogue between these groups to foster an educative environment that is supportive. What is suggested then is expanding the range of languages, perspectives, concepts, interests, selection and presentation of knowledge, social relations in the class, and sharing economic resources in school. Unfortunately there is no primrose procedure.

Calling for the inclusion of *Tongan* interests and values in schooling requires some clarification, for what is required is pedagogical decolonization: finance, parental involvement, curriculum reform, and drawing attention to the dialogical and moral aspects in schooling. Dialogical and morally responsive schooling is believed to incorporate warm interpersonal relationships; parents, tutors, students, the principal and the Board of Trustees talking in a sophisticated and mutually respectful way with each other. In a discussion of the virtuous school *tatala*, *fakatalatala*, and *mālie* are important and complex themes for including *Tongan* values and experiences of moral authority, for drawing out higher levels of human potential, for sharing values, and working together, for empowerment concerned with commitment, duties and obligations, as well as with knowledge (Manu`atu, 2000). These are the principles of *PōTalanōa* proposed earlier in the paper, and examples of its use and practice follow in the section on the *PōAko*.

Pedagogical decolonization or cultural diversity and good pedagogy are conceptualized as those relationships produced in innovative and worthwhile learning contexts that are not fixed but are created and recreated as the students and the teacher engage in schooling. The *PōAko* project depicted here was established on the relationships of exhilaration, love, and hope experienced by *Tongan* people from the suburb of Mt Roskill during the ASB Festival in 1991 and 1992. The *Tongan* parents gratified and empowered by their children's winning performances on stage, now sought ways to extend the passions and the successes gained in the performing arts to the classroom. For what was well-understood by the parents is that their children's academic success is low and something had to be done to transform the situation. Thus, in 1992, the *Tongan* community-based homework centre called *PōAko* was established at Mt Roskill Grammar School in Auckland. *Pō Talanoa* is a process of learning that is unique to *PōAko* and is integral to *Tongan* people's everyday living. The *PōAko* is a place in which *Tongan* students *talanoa* (*question*) with *Tongan* tutors the homework tasks set by the school. It is the place where the students enrich their intimate culture and academic learning by using both *Tongan* and English language. In turn, *talanoa* enables *Tongan* parents to raise personal, political, social, and economic matters with *Tongan* academics, community activists, and each other in the *pō* (Kēpa, 2001; Manu`atu, 2000).

The word *pō talanoa* is a verb and a noun. The noun *pō* refers to the night. The verb *talanoa* means to talk, to tell stories from the past, and to relate experiences of daily living. As a noun, *talanoa* is the talk, the story or the tale. As an approach to learning, *pōtalanoa* enables *Tongan* people to unfold insights into schooling as it is practiced in *Aotearoa*. Conceptualizing schooling as a cultural and political activity means including *Tongan* language into the learning process whereby *Tongan* people can connect with the place of our experiences and our relationships to our culture through dialogue. For example, through *talanoa* in the *pō*, anxious and frazzled parents talk with each other, the principal and the Board of Trustees about our children's schooling. At the heart of *pō talanoa* is the capacity of *Tongan* people to

relate with each other within a place based on kinship ties, faith, work, familiar experiences, knowledge, and so forth.

The significance of *pōtalanoa* lies in *Tongan* people's capacity to *tatala* and *fakatalatala* critically about the historical, political, philosophical, and cultural underpinnings of education in relation to them. The word *tatala* can allude to a variety of contexts. As a verb, *tatala* depicts some kind of movement such as to remove, to take off, or, to unwrap a cover surrounding a parcel and to unfold a roll of *tapa* cloth. Most important, it can mean to open a person's mind, body, and spirit to different viewpoints about some thing. In the latter sense, it could be said that *tatala* implies a separation of things that are connected by a multiplicity of layers or a network of some thing. In this sense, *tatala* can mean to unravel the social and cultural layers or relationships that prevail in school in order to understand how *Tongan* students accomplish learning or not. In another sense, to *tatala* can mean to draw together fragmented bits of information in order to create clarity about schooling and culture (Manu`atu, 2000). It should be highlighted that the parents bring with them a fragmented and vague perception of schooling and it is through *tatala* that they can connect and relate the bits of information thereby coming to understand more deeply what is going on in school. That is to say, that an educational issue is best understood when it is queried.

The word *fakatalatala* is produced by the causative prefix *faka* and by reduplicating the verb *tala*. Like *tatala*, *fakatalatala* alludes to a movement to separate, disentangle, release or detach some thing. Thus, it can be said to mean to unravel, to disentangle, or to separate out some thing. For instance, *fakatalatala* is useful in creating a sense of working together in a spirit of emergent understanding of the idea that the principal and teachers know what is best for *Tongan* students in school. No meaningful learning will take place if the process is devoid of context and practice. Consider, for a moment, that the tutors encourage the students to *fakatalatala* their misunderstandings and confusion about concepts they learn in mathematics in the English language. In the case of a mathematical problem,

fakatalatala contributes to clarifying the steps of systematic working in order to foster understanding. By appropriating *tatala* and *fakatalatala*, the relationships between ideas and subject content are queried and knowledge is shaped. Conceptualizing learning mathematics as a dialogical process means making sure that the students know how to carry out mathematical tasks competently and confidently.

Pōtalanoa can be produced not only by the interests of the people but through the *mālie* (social bonding) they experience when they talk together. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the myriad ways that *mālie* can be apprehended. It is sufficient to point out that in grammatical terms *mālie* is a verb, a noun, an adverb, and an adjective. It should be emphasized that actions produce *mālie* since the doers and the actors are forming meaningful and transforming relationships that can only be beneficial and advantageous to them in a 'connected' way, not in any exploitative way. Being connected refers to a holistic relationship between people and place. Since *mālie* espouses a philosophy of process, energy, and transformation it is central to *Tongan* people's pursuit of what it means to live life to the fullest potential. As a value, it draws upon *Tongan* language that provides insights into cultural meanings that the people construct to make sense of the relationships they form with each other and with other people in school (Manu`atu, 2000). Warm relationships, communication, and the exchange of ideas and experiences are important dispositions in strengthening the people's understandings of how the ASSPA protects and supports the programmes in school, for example. *Mālie* then refers to relationships that *Tongan* people create when shaping their world view and knowledge. Cordial, tender, and joyful relationships are paramount for vibrant communities and the realization of *Tongan* people's critical education.

By appropriating the principles of *pōtalanoa*, the parents discuss the secondary school and its structure including raising questions about how school structures are not constructed to privilege *Tongan* students' successful examination participation.

Of course, the parents have grasped already that there are subjects called mathematics, science, art, physical education, among others that are taught in English. They understand that there are examinations and tests throughout the school year. Nonetheless, as the parents' curiosity about schooling intensifies, there are many more serious and recurring themes engaged by them. One theme concerns how and why streaming or tracking that places *Tongan* students at the bottom of the school hierarchy is constructed. Another theme is the poor quality of content provided the students in low-stream classes. Further concerns are the poor teaching skills of the teachers who instruct classes in the low-stream and the limited material resources provided the students therein to sustain their learning. They raise questions about how and why significant numbers of *Tongan* students' potential to succeed on the sport field is denied by the school's decision-makers; rather, the executive's preference, conscious or not, is to purchase computer technology over equipment to develop a person's fitness and training to excel in rugby and netball. The point is that all of the practices queried by the parents highlight *Tongan* students' relegation to a site of failure in local and national examinations and, their omission from sport teams in school (Kēpa, 2001, Manu`atu, 2000).

Of course, *pōtalanoa* is more than just talking about the subjects *Tongan* students are learning and which ones they find difficult. As a conceptual framework, *pōtalanoa* suggests ways to dialogue in a complex way about the cultural and social forces on schooling. *Pōtalanoa* contributes ways to understand how schooling is socially constructed and structured; how *Tongan* people are produced, reproduced, and positioned by the arrangement (Manu`atu, 2000). It renders ways to apprehend how the people come to experience schooling. In addition, *pōtalanoa* produces ways of encouraging *Tongan* parents to speak about and question their relationships with their children, the principal and teachers, the Board of Trustees, the wider schooling structure, and their marginal status in society. It must be reemphasized that *pōtalanoa* that is *mālie* moves *Tongan* people beyond what is already known. Most important of all *pōtalanoa* raises and encounters the relation

of schooling to the world it inhabits and the relation of the student to his or her community and environment.

Upon reflection, for example, Mt Roskill Grammar School's record for *Tongan* students showed their academic performance to be poor or below average. However, *PōAko* provides a different view of their academic proficiencies. The Quality Service Indicator Report on Homework Centres at Mt Roskill Grammar School, 1994, 1995 convey a marked difference between the performance of *Tongan* students who attended the centre and those students who did not. The Reports express that:

*“the establishment of the Pō Ako gives some students the opportunity to perform exceptionally well and generally those students who attended Pō Ako did better than expected”.*¹⁴

Consider also that the 1994 School Certificate results showed a marked improvement in the performance of *Tongan* students who regularly attended the *PōAko* since 1992. That is seven *Tongan* students in Form Three in 1992 passed the National examination in 1994. Out of the forty-one papers 'sat' by the students they accomplished ten C grade, eight B grade, and three A grade passes. The significance of their academic performance lies in the fact that prior to 1994 no *Tongan* candidate in the school had obtained an A grade pass in any School Certificate subject. While the number of papers passed may not be stunning, the combined total of successful passes was the best result for *Tongan* students for decades (Kēpa, 2001, Manu`atu, 2000). What is notable about the students' success is that the low achievement experienced by *Tongan* candidates can be changed and that what it takes to begin transformative schooling cannot be the work of one person; rather, the commitment belongs to all of the participants in a programme. Recognition of all these values and examples of practice signal that *pōtalanoa* is dialogical, empowering, and most important gratifying to *Tongan* people.

The commitment to change schooling for the betterment of all students does not simply happen! The idea of transforming schooling for *Tongan* students at the Mt Roskill Grammar School is linked to *talanoa*, *tatala*, *fakatalatala*, and *mālie*, and dialogue and warm relationships are linked to hope, and hope is linked to the belief that change for the better is possible and that the parents, the tutors, the students, the principal, and the Board of Trustees are all responsible for conceptualizing pedagogical decolonization. *Pōtalanoa* as a conceptualization of pedagogical decolonization embodies the hope that the incompatibility between the culture that prevails in school and *indigenous* societies, amongst others can be swept away by human relationships that are patient, artistic, and active.

The purpose of schooling cannot be simply to distort, devalue, and disrupt the language and culture of *indigenous* students. Most important, the bright side of *pō talanoa* ought to be that a concept of schooling is being imagined that requires the ASSPA in partnership with Māori and Tongan people to transform the exclusionary approaches to teaching practice that prevail on stage, in the class and school.

Closing remarks

The writers have sought to question the ASSPA's conception of the culture of *indigenous Māori, Tongan* and Pacific Islands communities as a disruptive force upon their children's schooling. As well we have sought to provide innovative ways for understanding that schooling is a product of culture. In other words, schooling expresses a culture and contributes to constituting and reshaping it. Therefore, like any other human activity; culture and schooling require a critical analysis, not only at the implementation and application stages but also, and more important, at the level of key assumptions and values that oversee their conceptions, practices, and production.¹⁵

The principals' narrow understanding of culture makes it imperative that *indigenous* peoples attach themselves not only to the culture whose power rests on claims of superiority, universality, and ethical neutrality, but, also to *indigenous* concepts of

cultural diversity that links economics, politics, and education. Recognition of the concept and careful consideration of the attitudes will make it possible to ensure that *indigenous* students will no longer experience cultural devaluation, distortion and disruption in school.

Importantly, *indigenous* critiques can influence *indigenous* peoples' efforts for emancipation beyond the present unrelenting disruption of *indigenous* cultures by the prevailing society and culture. Imagination that initially inspires a concept for innovative teaching practice can provide approaches for further planning for cultural diversity and thus, pedagogical decolonization. All this will take generations to achieve – let future generations be proud of the steps the *Tongan* people and their *indigenous Māori* supporters and others took to humanize and revolutionize education in the *PōAko*.

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