# Out of Place: Economic imperialisms in early childhood education

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#### **Abstract**

New Zealand has received world-wide accolades for its Early Childhood Education (ECE) curriculum, Te Whāriki. This paper explores the tension between economic imperialism, and a curriculum acknowledged as visionary. The foundational ideas of Te Whāriki emanate from sociocultural and anti-racist pedagogies. However, its implementation is hampered by the overarching policy discourse of Human Capital Theory (HCT), with its instrumental emphasis on economic outcomes. While Te Whāriki offers local cultural and educational possibilities, HCT is presented by those espousing economic disciplines, as having universal application. These tensions, largely unacknowledged and unexplored, place ECE teachers in positions of difficulty. While trying to meet aspirational curriculum goals in their daily practices, teachers' attempts are constrained by supranational economic discourses. I ask how Edward Said's (1999, Out of place: A memoir, New York, Knopf) concept of contrapuntal readings can offer spaces for resistance to the dominance of economics.

Keywords: early childhood education policy, Edward Said, economic imperialism, Human Capital Theory

New Zealand (NZ) has received world-wide accolades for its early childhood education (ECE) curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 1996). However, its implementation is hampered by the overarching policy discourse of human capital theory (HCT) with its instrumental emphasis on economic outcomes. While *Te Whāriki* offers local cultural and educational possibilities, HCT is presented by those espousing economic disciplines, as having universal application. This paper explores the tension of economic imperialism in ECE, arguing that it is 'out of place' (Said, 1999). To Edward Said ideas may be examined historically in two ways '(1) genealogically in order that their provenance, their kinship and descent, their affiliation with political institutions may be demonstrated; (2) as practical systems for *accumulation* (of power, land, ideological legitimacy) and *displacement* (of people, other ideas, prior legitimacy' (Said, 1992, p. 56, original emphases). I apply these examinations to the context of *Te Whāriki*.

## Contrapuntal Readings: Said's Metaphor

Drawing on his experiences as a Palestinian exile in American academia, Edward Said combined a passion for classical music and English literature. From these interests he evoked a theory of texts as fields of power and national interest. Said explored the tonal metaphor of contrapuntal theory in his book *Culture and imperialism*. The universalising discourses emanating from Europe and North America, he argued in effect silenced the colonised people of the non-European world. Illustrations of such discourse can be found in texts which foreground the English way of life, while relegating imperial and economic aspects to the peripheries. There are both silences and coercions, which together create an 'ensemble ... a relationship that is more than coincidental' (1993, p. 58). His telling example is of the calm English parochialism portrayed in Jane Austin's *Mansfield Park* which cannot be read without acknowledgement of the slave culture of Antigua that sustains such tranquility. Resources from the periphery sustain the centre's economy. Imperialism, Said asserted, is a contest between 'north and south, metropolis and periphery, white and native', which, as the themes play off one another create 'concert and order' (Said, 1993, p. 59).

As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to read it not univocally but *contrapuntally* with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history ... and those of other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourses act. (Said, 1993, p. 59)

A contrapuntal reading is about 'what to read' and 'how to read it' (Said, 1993, p. 312): to become aware of the subsuming linear perspective of history and geography, together with resistances to the imperial processes. Texts, Said argued, work together with institutions, borrow, inform and are informed by each other. The 'literature of one commonwealth is involved in the literature of others' (Said, 1993, p. 386). None are separate: no country is 'exempt from the debate about what is to be read, taught or written' (Said, 1993, p. 386). Political discourse institutionalises power in a 'classificatory grid' (Said, 1992, p. 71).

#### Diverse Ways 'Of Knowing and Being'?

Education policy determines 'what is to be read, taught or written' (Said, 1993, p. 386), the content of national curriculum, the knowledge and dispositions to be fostered. NZ policy documents sometimes note that indigenous peoples, earlier located in peripheral areas, suffered a disadvantage that needs remedying, in the twenty-first century. They are often poorly skilled and underemployed. ECE policy is an example of a policy that reflects a particular view on what is acceptable for learning and teaching and as a device to mitigate the effects of disadvantage.

To give a geographical and historical context to such policy anxiety, NZ was colonised by the British in the nineteenth century. The country became a part of the British Empire (later the Commonwealth). Although the indigenous peoples, the Māori, became British subjects, many lost their economic bases through Crown confiscations and land sales. In the mid-twentieth century, government policy supported Māori to move from traditional rural sites to take up trade-training in the cities. New migrants

arrived, too, from the Pacific, Europe and Asia. All of these peoples needed support from the education system, so they could contribute to the economy (New Zealand Treasury, 1987). Education, some now believe, can support individuals to gain an economic foundation which will allow them to successfully navigate employment markets. ECE offers such a foundation.

The ECE curriculum document is an example of the silences, the emphases, the materiality and the instrumental purposes of policy documents. In this section I use *Te Whāriki* as a site of both struggle and dialogue, an example of identity in the post-colonial world. Said himself explored the fact that texts are positioned: 'not simply because texts are in the world, but also because as texts they place themselves—that is, one of their functions as texts is to place themselves—and they are themselves by acting, in the world' (1975, p. 9). Edward Said argues that the

fact of writing itself is a systematic conversion of the power relationship between the controller and the controlled into mere written words; the reason this happens is to let it seem that writing is only writing, whereas writing is one way of disguising the awesome materiality of so tightly controlled and managed a production. (Said, 1975, p. 16 citing Michel Foucault)

Texts refer to other texts; displace other writings. No text can exist in isolation, but draws the reader by analogy into the political discourse of the day. There are both implicit and explicit aspects of power relations, of both making openings for, and repressing perceptions.

Māori are an example of peoples who may share 'overlapping territories' (Said, 1993) with Pākehā in NZ, but not equal educational and economic opportunity. When reading contrapuntally one needs to 'think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant' (Said, 1993, p. 36). Such readings rely on histories within a social and geographic setting, to interpret and appreciate the power of ideology. The perspective of Māori, juxtaposed with other assumptions to 'make concurrent those views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other, and that attempt to distance and suppress other views and experiences' (Said, 1993, p. 37) may be examined in light of Said's broader injunction—to unearth the hidden dominant forces at work in colonisation.

Traditionally in this country, individual first nations' peoples viewed themselves as independent, self-managing, sovereign groupings, each with their unique cultural understandings, foundation stories and languages. While there is a generic language, understood by all, there are significant local cultural and dialectal differences. There has been considerable debate about these as intellectual property, owned by the local hapū and iwi, rather than the Crown. There is a wealth of information about the loss of peoples and of their spiritual attachments to land which was also 'lost' through confiscation. In the first four decades of the twentieth century, children were educated in schools, where the speaking of their home tongues was forbidden. If caught speaking Māori in the school playground, children could be physically punished. Māori took the Crown to a judicial hearing, in a court set up to hear issues about cultural redress and loss. The Waitangi Tribunal (1986; 6.3.8) found against the Crown, advising that it had failed 'to protect the Māori language'. The Crown forced by

Māori, through social pressure and litigation, have accepted a regulatory responsibility for including Māori language across all education sectors. The reason for the emphasis on teaching Te Reo and Tikanga is simple: it was, and still is, at risk of extinction.

Until the late 1980s, ECE in NZ had been fragmented, with funding going inequitably to some service types. There was political pressure to give effect to Māori educational aspirations as well as more local community input into curriculum topics. The requirement for a NZ ECE curriculum arose from an environment where policymakers sought certainty. Education reforms in the 1980s, and the Education Act, 1989, attempted a degree of conformity across the ECE sector by bringing all services under one regulatory and funding regime and devolved responsibility to each centre. Government ensured that education was delivered by schools and ECE services, requiring quality syllabi with clear measurements of learning. Education Minister, Lockwood Smith (1990-1996) sought to implement a seamless curriculum, which would cover all sectors, from ECE to secondary (see Te One, 2003; Nuttall, 2005). Winners of the ECE curriculum contract Helen May and Margaret Carr put Te Whāriki Mātauranga mo ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa, draft ECE curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1993) out for consultation. It was widely supported by diverse ECE services, and in 1996, the final Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996) was adopted. Many within the wider ECE community see ECE as primarily a way of ensuring social justice for children, of addressing the earlier inequities.

A devolved system of educational governance to individual sites contains inherent tensions. One tension is the role of Crown agencies such as the Education Review Office and Ministry of Education in supporting ECE centres in their delivery, monitoring and quality control of Te Reo Māori. There is an issue about the role of Te Reo in the curriculum document. In Te Whāriki there is an acknowledgement of indigenous Māori ways of knowing and being. A section written only in Māori is not a translation of the English text. While this could a part of 'resistance culture', of 'recovery and repatriation' (Said, 1993, p. 253), it can also be construed as freezing the language in a policy text. The state requires ECE teachers and centres to foster Māori language through regulatory measures. The effect has been a disconnection the development of a generic language and culture, located in this country, but not embedded in local hapū control. While many individuals are well intentioned, much of the teaching in ECE is of low-level language (teacher initiated instruction only) rather than a rich evocative lexicon. In sum, questions about how texts can represent the real world—how policy can affect social justice—remain. Te Whāriki continues as a site for struggle about differing representations.

A second tension is pedagogy—aspirational intent to use Te Reo—as educational restitution for appropriation of land, language and culture by the dominant Pākehā people—exiles in a land far from 'home'. The narrative in *Te Whāriki* is ahistorical. The curriculum narrative is beyond the boundaries of memory. There are de-contextualised references to the developing 'a knowledge and understanding of the cultural heritages of both partners to the Treaty of Waitangi' (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 24). Teachers are predominately mono-lingual Pākehā with very little understanding of Māori history and culture. Many of these Pākehā are current beneficiaries of earlier confiscations of Māori land. In a phrase deleted from the later version, the

1993 document notes that Māori is an official language. 'Māori language and culture have only one home; if they are lost here, they will be lost forever' (Ministry of Education, 1993, p. 13): perhaps an implicit allusion to nineteenth-century loss of land. The sense of 'home' of 'place' is very important to Māori expressed through the term 'turangawaewae' (Manning, 2012). It is also being explored by some as 'as a counterpoint to globalization' (Duhn, 2012). Place and its importance reoccurs in *Te Whāriki* where the significance of 'people, places and things' could be perhaps rephrased as 'peoples, places and things', and assemblages of peoples in the place. It is increasingly tied to identity within NZ.

It may be, as Said notes that the limitation of national identity is that it presumes a common history between coloniser and colonised. Yet, the violence of colonisation affects both Pākehā and Māori materially and emotionally in different ways. Despite terms such as 'mana' and 'tangata whenua', *Te Whāriki* is silent on such psychological effects of colonisation on both parties; only the 'other' has an 'identity'.

#### Confinement: Hegemony of Economic Knowledge

Schooling is in Edward Said's phrase (1993, p. 396) about 'confinement'. Māori children (sent to church-mission schools in the nineteenth century and to native schools in the early twentieth century) are now being encouraged into participation in ECE centres. Such confinement is about the counting, educating and regulating the bodies of those peoples deemed to require governing. The 'natives' were increasingly drawn from the periphery of the developing nation, to the metropolitan centre, where they could be seen, taxed and 'ruled in regulated places' (Said, 1993, p. 396).

All readers should appraise the American focus on 'commodification and specialization' (Said, 1993, p. 387). Lazear (1999, p. 6) names such commodification as 'economic imperialism': 'the extension of economics to topics that go beyond the classical scope of issues'. Underpinning the education reforms of the late 1980s was a range of ideas emanating from the Chicago School of Economics. Neoliberal economic ideas of New Public Management, Public Choice Theory and HCT continue to be a dominant influence in the twenty-first century (see e.g. Olssen, 2001; Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004). These theories are instrumental, with individuals viewed as self-seeking entrepreneurs working to maximise their self-interest in the marketplace. Theorists portray education as merely one facet of the competitive marketplace, where educational institutions are viewed as firms, whose prime function is to maximise their economic interests; to ply education for profit. HCT envisioned the well-educated entrepreneur investing in him- or herself to gain marketable credentials. The student is viewed as actuarial investor outlaying on future educational assets to maximise her competitive advantage. Individuals need to gain qualifications and retrain to keep them current across their employment lifespan. Moreover, there is an understanding that individual's skill level and wealth can be aggregated to measure the national skill-bases and be competitive on the international stage. HCT with its affirmation of individual choice has been criticised by some for applying its economic individual lens to all aspects of human life (Blaug, 1976; Fitzsimmons, 1999; Marginson, 1997). Individual could apply the concept of marginal utility to happiness, criminal interest and marriage choices. A HCT assumption is that the rational actors' market behaviour can be predicted over the lifespan, when making choices about meat or marriage. Predictions are based on normative expectations, economic modelling and statistical patterns plotted over time (Blaug, 1992, pp. 209–260). In the HCT, market credentialism is a proxy for screening candidates to hire; the education system as a foundation for employment skills (Blaug, 1992; Marginson, 1997).

Contemporary statistical data show that discrete groups are falling behind the national norms. Contemporary government policy aims to rectify poor educational outcomes for groups such as the Māori and other non-achieving groups such as the Pacific Islanders. Governments' roles are to regulate, order, legislate and manage populations within their territory. A vital tool is the collection of statistical data, which supports knowledge of the population and of groupings within the national border (what Foucault names as the 'population-wealth' problem (Foucault, 1994, p. 69)). With the use of statistics, there is an increasing use of norms, means and normative comparisons, as statisticians and policy-makers seek to target educational investments for greatest effectiveness. In such economic parlance, Māori are rarely portrayed as indigenous – as people with a sustainable culture.

Of particular concern to governments is the skill-deficit of certain discrete groupings within its population. HCT has influenced government policy concerning ECE and its cost-effectiveness as a state early intervention investment since the turn of the twenty-first century. Led by the supranational agencies such as the OECD and World Bank, many national governments have adopted the HCT promulgated by microeconometricians such as James Heckman. Heckman and others, drawing extensively on longitudinal, American data collected in the mid-twentieth century, argue that monies invested early, pays dividends. Such theories have left their places of origin, to become accepted in places like NZ as an economic 'truth'.

It would be no surprise to Edward Said to learn that the supposedly 'risky' groups are those brought by the state from the periphery to the centre: the Māori and Pasifika. Concern about the skill-base and the assumed risk to the national economy can be found in policy documents as diverse as those from NZ Treasury to Ministry of Education. The discourse about the 'tail' of disadvantage has reached a crescendo in the twenty-first century, with titles like 'Closing the Gaps for Maori and Pacific Peoples' (Treasury, 2000) and statements such as 'The most significant contribution to Māori economic development over the next 20 years is likely to come from improving the education and skills of Māori people ...' (Treasury, 2005).

Books, scripts, governmental discourse from state ministries, like treasury or education, are affected by politics, despite oppositional voices offering alternative perspectives. Said's criticism (citing Mohanty, 1989, pp. 1–31) that there can be seen the 'privilege of "objectivity" to "our side" [with] ... the encumbrance of "subjectivity" on "theirs" (p. 312) is evident in policy documents. The latest research often arrives via the economic emissaries from treasury, bolstered by reports from international publications. Yet texts, Said emphasised, are cultural practices which are never complete. The reader can learn to read contrapuntally – 'knowing *how* to read' as well as 'what to read' (Said, 1993, p. 312, emphases in original). Reading government policy

is about intellectual choices, just as writing policy was about deciding what to include, what to exclude. It is also Said (1993, p. 386) suggests about a global analysis where texts and institutions are working together, intertwined, not in a harmonic symphony, but on an 'atonal' ensemble. Problematisations may allow readings of 'texts from the metropolitan centre and from the peripheries contrapuntally' (Said, 1993, p. 312). A critical reading of the position of the 'other', the group or groups who are located on the edge of policy, about which the government expresses 'objective' concerns, is possible. Identity is constructed in the text, which is located within the field of power, within the world which produces the text for reasons of political concern. Marshall (2007, p. 15ff) discussed the melding of the social, the economic and the political as new concepts emerge as a 'problem' of the present, which may not have been viewed as problematic in an earlier time. The reader, by 'stepping back' (Marshall, 2007, p. 20), can reflect upon and explore the contexts of a problem. By accepting nothing as 'truth' the reader can examine the problematisation of contemporary positioning; the constructions of the history of this present problem.

Policy writers and analysts 'know' the other through the figures of the state. Demographics demonstrate the achievements, failing, numerical patterning of populations within the national territory. The word and the text in the world require readers, who can locate the power bases, attune themselves to other portrayals. If theory travels, leaves its place of origin, to sing the same song in a new land, the critic should listen for the nuances of change, the reviewed emphases. The links between education and colonial powers of imperialism can be listened to in each new text, be it policy or education. Texts provide spaces for struggles between representations, places, ethnicities. Texts are never neutral; their writing and the reading of them involve 'interests, powers, passions, pleasures ... Media, political economy, mass institutions—in fine, the tracings of secular power and the influence of the state' (Said, 1993, p. 385). To have meaning there needs to be a large amount of congruence—to be 'in the true' (Foucault, 1972, p. 233). What this often means is a borrowing across disciplines of language, especially as languages intertwine. When education was conceived and structured as a marketplace, much of the language of pedagogy was adopted by economics, of economics by education—there was a cross-fertilisation. Behind such borrowing are attempts to ensure a melding, a harmony of purpose, a synchronisation of rationalities.

Examples of such rationalities can be found in policy on ECE (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2002). The authors suggest that *Te Whāriki*, which is a 'world leader' (p. 7) will provide a roadmap (Ministry of Education, 2002, foreword) with an emphasis on foundations whereby children are enabled to direct their own lives (p. 9). The curriculum, the authors suggest, needs to be 'implemented effectively' (p. 4) using 'quality interaction' between adults and children (p. 12). The concept of 'biculturalism' (p. 13) is revisited in diverse ways, leadership of kaumatua and kuia, and the need to consult widely with whānau and Māori families. It is here that the economic purposes become more explicit—'education lays the foundation for children's later learning' (*Quality in Action*, p. 5, cited in Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 12). ECE is particularly important, the authors suggest, for those children from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' (Ministry of Education, 2002, p. 9). Participation in

ECE is particularly low among 'Māori, Pasifika, low socioeconomic and rural communities' (p. 10). The tensions between the economic and educational discourses were implicit, rather than explicit, in the Fourth Labour Government's ECE policy, as this government's belief in the 'third (middle economic) way' ameliorated the harshness of the message.

Synchronisations of the fugue, its tonal concepts, expositions, and imitations become explicit in the *Agenda for Amazing Children* (Early Childhood Taskforce Report [ECTR], 2011), the ECE policy of the National Coalition Government (2008—to present). A background paper, written by Anne Smith, senior ECE academic, and Taskforce member, notes that

An educated and skilled population gives huge advantages to a society and to individuals. Poorer education is linked to lower earnings, lower paid employment (or unemployment), lack of retirement savings and social exclusion, while more education is associated with secure futures and opportunities. (Smith, 2010, Summary of Esping-Anderson, 2008, p. 2)

Throughout *ECTR* economic writings are cited as rationalities for ECE investment. These are among the most cost-effective investments available to governments, making the difference between 'dependence' and having a 'healthy and productive life' (ECTR, 2011, p. 13).

'[There is an] impressive body of research evidence confirms that returns from quality ECE are high and long lasting. Therefore, this is one of the most important investments a country can make' (ECTR, 2011, p. 3).

Most of the evidence is drawn from international examples, notably the publications of micro-economist James Heckman. 'Those programmes had common characteristics ... [They] incurred significant up-front costs. However, where cost-benefit analyses were performed ... the findings showed that for every dollar invested, the resulting returns fell within the range of \$3-\$16' (ECTR, 2011, p. 21). Heckman's oft-cited phrase that 'skills beget skills' is repeated (Heckman & Masterov, 2004; ECTR, 2011, p. 21). The examples of poor and unemployed Americans have become proxy for populations within Aotearoa; policy fixes for governments keen to adopt simplistic economic solutions to complex social problems. Economic universals applied in another context are a contemporary example of the power of imperialism. Said cautions readers against considering 'territory in too literal a way' (Said, 1992, p. 73). Imperium he continues includes 'having power over its ideas, people ... its land, converting people, land and ideas to the purposes and for the use of an hegemonic imperial design; all this as a result of being able to treat reality appropriatively' (Said, 1992, p. 73).

#### Out of Place: Economic Hegemony

Texts unless continually re-read and resisted, become monuments, frozen in time, unable to represent the fluidity of learning. They are cultural artifacts of the society and time that produced them. They emanate as Scheurich and Young (2002) suggest from civilisational attitudes. However, using a musical analogy, Said suggests that we

can both hear the colonisers, exiles far from 'home' holding strict attitudes and listen to the colonised – holding firm to their own realities: to read for the silences together with the crescendos. To understand the tensions between the economic and pedagogical discourses, using a 'contrapuntal reading' one must, as Said (1993, p. 79) suggests, 'take account of both processes, that of imperialism, and that of resistance to it ... [T]o become subject to disputation', by connecting the structures of a narrative, the experiences and concepts from which the imperialising discourse draws its support. 'Hybrid' texts such as government policy, Said (1993, p. 80) suggests, require especial vigilance. A vigilance critiquing the attitudes and perceptions such policy texts advance about a globalised world view, a universalising of experiences that assimilate all into the one symphony.

#### What to Read and How to Read

History and geography have been reworked in new types of connections, in NZ, as newly urbanised Māori became exiles in their own homelands. It was, as Said (1993, p. 384) suggested, not the fate of a few, but an experience closer to the norm, where the Pākehā exile experienced a 'crossing of boundaries ... charting new territories'. Literature, including the written curriculum testify to the 'contests and continuing struggles by virtue of which they emerged both as texts and as historical experiences' (Said, 1993, p. 384).

Recent government ECE policy, despite using the language of *Te Whāriki*, is underpinned by a theory that has travelled – a song with origins in another time and place. The portrayal of poor, black, American children has been appropriated for purposes of economics. The unemployed mothers on the American continents have become proxy, in the NZ policy literature, for their counterparts at home. Pasifika families are portrayed as similar to the contemporary immigrants to Europe, as lacking skills and training. Economics has instrumentalised ECE and utilised its fughetta for its own purposes. Both parent and child are constructed in economic parlance, as educational entrepreneurs, requiring paternalistic encouragement to better their circumstances through the acquisition of marketable skills, for both familial and national gains.

Yet, there are also moments of hope, of alternative voices. In *Te Whāriki*, there is acknowledgement of indigeneity, of the special place of Māori in NZ. Collective good rather than individual self-interest is promoted in the curriculum's principles. To support such collective good educators aspire to teaching Māori language, culture and pedagogical style of. The curriculum's very materiality is both strength and a weakness. The document was a challenge to political attempts to instrumentalise learning through a national curriculum seeking to determine learners' knowledge, skill and attitudes. Yet, it is also the site of challenges from Māori, seeking to have the nativist views incorporated into it. It shows both the sites of power at the time it was produced, yet remains as a site for new readings, interpretations, possibilities in the future. Despite the 'authorisation' of the official curriculum document by the Ministry of Education, alternative stories exist.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, within the wider discourse, the spaces for struggle, for local alternatives continue to be articulated. Texts, Said continued, 'create not their own precedents ... but

their successors' (1993, p. 312). Despite the connotation of appropriation offered by 'bicultural models' (e.g. Ministry of Education, 1993, 1996, 2004), there is a growing body of texts, linked to that offer a Māori perspective on pedagogy *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2009; Rameka, 2003, 2011).

### Glossary

Ao Māori—the Māori world—spiritual, material, epistemological

Hapū—Māori subtribe

He Whāriki Mātauranga mo` ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa—the title of the compulsory early childhood education curriculum—a whariki is a mat, or cover

Iwi-wider Māori tribe

Kauamatua and kuia—revered elders.

Māori—the name of the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori means normal.

Pākehā or Tauiwi—Māori name for the later comers—such as European or Asian Te Reo Māori—the Māori language

Turangawaewae—collective home: place where one has the right to stand—place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship.

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#### Note

1. An early (Ministry of Education, 1993) version had explicit attempts to share power between the dominant culture and iwi Māori. Such statements were removed or less evident in the later (Ministry of Education, 1996) version.

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