

Breaking the educational constraints: New visions, new pathways

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Abstract: The commentary by Carl Mika on the paper by Hook regarding “A National Māori University” suggests that such an institution could prove of value in the investigation of Māori epistemology and ontology. The creation of new ideas and new knowledge as outcomes would be fundamental to a National Māori University. A National Māori University could break the educational constraints imposed by Pākehā through the 1989 Education Act and provide an important step towards achieving Māori tino rangatiratanga (self-determination).

Keywords: National Māori University, epistemology, ontology, tino rangatiratanga.

It seemed to me, at first, that Mika’s comments regarding my paper titled “A National Māori University” (Hook, 2010) stood alone, and that there was nothing that I could add to clarify either his or my arguments for or against the proposition. However, I was particularly intrigued by his focus on epistemology and ontology, studies on the nature of knowledge and of being, and his suggestion that these two aspects of Māori existence might progress naturally within such an institution and indeed prove critical in that institution’s development (Mika, 2010). I thank Mika for his stimulating ideas and look forward to more opportunities to debate the nature of Māori epistemology and ontology.

Usually, the question that arises upon contemplation of a new institution concerns curricula, educational methodology, policies, environment, the student body, staff and a thousand other details. Mika suggests that epistemology and ontology might be more basic and indeed essential to the existence of a National Māori University. Certainly, the pursuit of such ideas would be totally appropriate within a Māori university; however, the nature of university education means that the whole basket of human knowledge could be made available to Māori revealed beneath the light of the Māori experience. That which emerges could serve as a foundation for Māori intellectual creativity in a way that has never before been available. This creation of new knowledge by Māori would in turn become an advancement of human knowledge representing the maturation of the Māori intellect and a recognition of the resilience and determination of the Māori spirit.

A Māori University could embody the experiences of our elders, but in ways rendered meaningful to those who embrace the struggle for equality and meaning in life. For elders to walk amongst the young in a learning environment is fulfilling for both, and a reminder that the Pākehā way of learning is not the beginning and end of intellectual development; the casting aside of elders is not the Māori way. In addition, the search for new insights into life’s meanings could arise from the interactions of enlightened individuals willing to share their experiences with young and eager minds. Māori students would benefit greatly from exposure to some of the great indigenous thinkers brought from all over the world to share their experiences and life’s work. The discipline of kaitiakitanga could blossom as a distinctly Māori approach to nature lending itself to rigour and analysis. New business models based on Māori social values could be developed as a means of overcoming the deficiencies of neoliberalism. The world-wide antagonism of minority ethnic groups to colonial disregard of human rights could become a platform for the renaissance in indigenous self determination all over the world, but spear-headed by Māori academia. Each day could be a celebration of

human diversity in a way that only the indigenous survivors of the colonial experience can celebrate. A place where Māori need explain to no one their reasons for ritual or haka, reinstated under the auspices of tipuna, invigorated through mauri and ihi, transformed into a living testimony to the worthiness of the Māori people. I'm getting carried away, but what an exciting place a National Māori University could be.

The educational confinement of Māori institutions to things Māori as defined under the 1989 Education Act (Acts of the NZ Parliament, 1989) of the New Zealand Parliament was an act of self-righteous paternalism by Pākehā, and an expression of their low opinion of indigenous intellectual achievements. Under the Education Act Pākehā ring-fenced for themselves everything that lay outside of things Māori. The three wānanga defined by the Education Act were not universities and their focus was, by definition, exclusively Māori. Māori dreams of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) were thus contained through Pākehā control of education (Hook, 2010).

A National Māori University is about breaking those educational constraints that have been laid upon Māori and reaching for true educational equality. True educational equality brings with it racial, economic and social equality, a set of equalities long overdue in this country. Educational history over the last 200 years clearly shows that such equality is not achievable as long as Pākehā control Māori education (Hook, 2010). The establishment of a National Māori University, well-equipped and fully funded from the public purse, would be a major step towards the tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) agreed upon 170 years ago in the Treaty of Waitangi.

References

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