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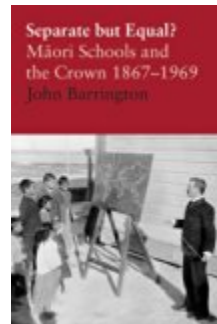
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

J. M. Barrington. *Separate but Equal?: Maori Schools and the Crown 1867-1969*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2008. 383 pp. \$36.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-86473-586-7.

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Published on H-Education (January, 2011)

Commissioned by Jonathan Anuik



Assimilating Māori into New Zealand Society

John Barrington's book, *Separate but Equal? Māori Schools and the Crown 1867-1969*, is a detailed examination of the New Zealand government's efforts to educate and assimilate Māori students, building on missionary efforts to create "Brown Britons" (p. 14). The government's view was that there was a choice to "civilize or exterminate," with English being a "perfect language" to replace the Māori language, which was an "imperfect medium of thought" (p. 20). Too often, bilingualism was seen as a problem and educating Māori youth was thought of as a way to later save money on police and prisons.

Barrington makes extensive use of government records, including letters from Māori school commission members and parents. He starts with the 1867 Native Schools Act, which provided the basis for setting up native schools for Māori children in the years following the New Zealand land wars of the 1860s. That same year, a Native Representation Act gave the Māori some voice in New Zealand's parliament. Throughout his book, Barrington assumes his reader has some knowledge of New Zealand history and leading Māoris such as Sir Apirana Ngata.

The Māori who supported the Crown in the land wars were the first to ask for schools. To get them they had to donate land and services for schools that were often poorly built, underfunded, and undersupplied. "When teachers could be found, they varied from excellent and devoted to being incapable misfits" (p. 30). Some were culturally sensitive and some were not. Teachers also

took on multiple roles, serving also as community postmasters and health workers.

By 1879, there were 57 small Māori schools, but a lack of roads often made attendance at them difficult. Local Māori school committees had little power but could exert some influence on what went on in the schools. The government saw the committees mainly as a means of promoting attendance. Around 1899, there was a move to learning by doing and an emphasis on vocational manual labor in Māori education that lasted for four decades. In 1929, the native schools had 260 white, 24 full-blood Māori, and 22 mixed-blood teachers. In 1939, there were 145 native schools with 10,403 students.

The original goal of the schools was to provide a primary education and English-language skills so that young Māoris could stay on the land and become farmers and farmers' wives, with a few of the brightest students going on to denominational boarding schools. Teaching English was central to the purpose of the native schools, and it was usually taught by the "direct method" that excluded any use of the Māori language. As long as the Māori language was dominant in Māori homes, schools were considered by many Māori as the route to learning English and being able to compete in the *Pākehā* (white) world. James Pope, the government's inspector for native schools from 1880 to 1903, wrote textbooks used in the native schools' curricula that better related to Māori life and would thus be easier to understand by young Māori.

For the best native school students there were some scholarships to denominational boarding schools of which Te Aute is the most well known. In 1913, ten denominational boarding schools served Māori students, including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Mormon schools. These schools were pressured by the government to take an agricultural-vocational focus similar to the elementary schools. Native high schools were established in the 1930s that continued an agricultural-vocational focus, but good vocational education was more expensive than academic studies, which required only books and desks. In addition, by the 1930s, a rapidly growing Māori population could no longer be supported only by agricultural activities. By 1951, a little more than half the Māori students were in regular, non-native schools, and the number of Māori living in urban areas had increased from 9 percent in 1936 to 50 percent in 1966. The demographic change and the increasing English-language competence of Māori students led to the end of the separate school system in 1969 and the inclusion of the native schools in the regular New Zealand school system.

An interesting element of this book is Barrington's documentation of how educational ideas crossed the oceans from Britain, North America, and Africa, including the transference of ideas about British African colonial education, Booker T. Washington's approach to Negro education in the United States, and the U.S. Indian Office's approach. One Māori school inspector even studied under John Dewey in the United States, and Dewey's writings appeared in the native schools column of New Zealand's *Education Gazette* in the 1930s. The less-assimilationist educational policies of the "Indian New Deal" in the late 1930s and early 1940s in the United States were also noticed by New Zealand educators. Colonialist notions about the dangerous potential of education to encourage rebellion, as in India, circulated, as did anthropological ideas of cultural relativism and the value of native cultures that questioned assimilationist educational approaches. Greater recognition by *Pākehā* of Māori culture led, in 1929, to Māori becoming

part of the Bachelor of Arts curriculum at the University of New Zealand and, in 1969, the establishment of a Chair of Māori Studies and Oceanic Linguistics at the University of Auckland.

Sir Apirana Ngata, the most prominent Māori of his generation, wrote in 1959: "The chief and almost fatal obstruction was the course of education to which the policy of New Zealand committed the children of both races. That policy was enthusiastically approved by the elders of my tribe Ngati Porou. Indeed Rapata Wahawaha ... one of the most accomplished men in things Maori pinned his faith to Pakeha education for the rising youth of the race.... The result in my case, my education in the music and singing of my own people was short-circuited. The years that followed at Te Aute almost completed the suppression of any taste or desire for the prized accomplishment in the society to which my kin belonged" (p. 132).

Barrington concludes, "From 1867 to at least the 1940s, education officials generally had a very limited view of Māori potential and the place of Māori in the wider society" (p. 297). He repeatedly criticizes the bureaucratic, centralized administration of the native schools for making them less responsive to local needs and ends his book with a brief reference to the establishment of *Pūnako* language nests in the 1980s and the current effort to revitalize Māori language and culture in Māori language immersion schools that have spread across New Zealand in the last two decades.

In *Separate but Equal?*, Barrington provides a valuable addition to readers' knowledge of ethnocentric colonial approaches to indigenous education. He documents for those in New Zealand the many commonalities as well as a few differences in how these approaches worldwide tended to devalue indigenous languages and cultures. Finally, for historians of education, the book illustrates how teachers and administrators underestimated the academic potential of indigenous students, with often devastating results for entire indigenous societies.

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Citation: Jon Reyhner. Review of Barrington, J. M., *Separate but Equal?: Maori Schools and the Crown 1867-1969*. H-Education, H-Net Reviews. January, 2011.

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