

Letters from Abroad

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Douglas G. Ball is deputy director of education for New Zealand, in charge of the education of all native races in the British controlled islands of the South Pacific under the educational jurisdiction of New Zealand. The work described in this article is his work. His enlightened vision of adapting the education of the Maoris to their own lives and their own needs as well as to the encroaching civilization in which they must live is significant, not only in itself, but from a broad educational standpoint. In schools everywhere there are children whose home background and culture are divergent from that which is assumed by the school. The same principles that apply to the education of the Maoris apply to such children.

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Education of the Maori

IN 1840, the sovereignty of New Zealand was ceded to Queen Victoria. In accordance with British custom the education of the native race then became a function of Government.

In 1844, the Native Trust Ordinance was enacted, the preamble of which was as follows:

"Whereas the native people of New Zealand are by natural endowments apt for the acquirement of the arts and habits of civilized life, and are capable of great moral and social advancement. And whereas large numbers of the people are already desirous of being instructed in the English language and in English arts and usages. And whereas great disasters have fallen upon uncivilized nations on being brought into contact with colonists from the nations of Europe, and in undertaking the colonization of New Zealand Her Majesty's Government have recognized the duty of endeavouring by all practical means to avert the like disasters from the native people of

these islands, *which object may best be attained by assimilating as possible the habits and usages of the native to those of the European population . . .*"

The last clause of this statement expressed the principle on which the education of the Maori was based for the next 100 years. For the first thirty or forty years education was left in the hands of the missions but about the middle of the nineteenth century the first Government schools were established and in 1879 the administration of native schools became a function of the national Education Department.

From the very beginning the Government schools set out to turn each little Maori into a little European. The English language was the language of the school and English behavior and English values had to be imitated by each child. The policy of direct assimilation was carried to such an extreme that it was a punishable offence for a Maori child to speak his own language in the school playground.

In the classroom the Maori child learned to speak and write English, some simple geography of Europe and a little English history. He was taught the dull art of the nineteenth century elementary school and the arithmetic that saw no necessity to make its studies meaningful. The living example of his teacher's way of life which it was hoped he would emulate later, was too far removed from his daily experience to be really effective.

Unfortunately for the classroom, Maori children came from homes where life was lived rhythmically and where the exciting history of their own heroic race was woven into the texture of everyday conversation. The Maori child's social life went on round a meeting house carved by artists working in a great tradition. History, art, rhythmic dance, rich metaphorical language, were a part of their Maori life. They were proud to be Maoris and found their satisfactions and happiness in Maori ways.

Survey Reveals Startling Facts

Against this rich and human education the alien teaching of the European school had little success. How little was not realized until, in 1930, a survey revealed the fact that the Maori language was still the only language used in 95% of the Maori homes, and that the great majority of Maoris still lived in a primitive way, and most of them in primitive houses. There had been, of course, some modification of the social and family patterns but by no means as much as had been hoped and expected and not always in a direction that was desired.

The reasons were, to those who studied the problem in the light of the 1930 survey, fairly clear. The schools had simply failed to understand their pupils or to take any

proper account of the influences at work in their lives—the mores and the institutions of their own people—and consequently had made no contact with the deeper part of the children's natures. They had been content to impose a shallow verbal education, apparently in the belief that if a child learned the precepts he would retain the practices.

Instead of building up the Maori's opinion of himself and his abilities by basing his education on what was admirable in his culture, the Government schools tended to make him ashamed of his native heritage. They had not entirely succeeded in this, but they had created in the Maori an inhibiting sense of insecurity.

Under these circumstances, some doubted whether the Maori was capable of adjusting to European culture, but the fact that the Maori people had in fact adjusted themselves to life in this temperate country after migrating from the tropics, and the further fact that a few Maoris, such as Sir Apirana Ngata, Sir Peter Buck, and Sir James Carrol had achieved a high degree of European culture and were eminent in science, law and politics, made it quite apparent that success could be achieved if a right way could be found.

The results of the survey, supported by the work of modern psychologists, anthropologists, and educationists, showed that the problem was much more complex than had been originally thought. Many generations would come and go before the two cultures could merge to the benefit of each. A new policy for Maori education was necessary. It seemed that if education was to be of real assistance to the Maori in a setting which was so predominantly European, it should both give attention to the cultural inherit-

ance of the Maori and understand his present predicament and help him to meet the needs arising therefrom. It seemed wise that the schools should become Maori schools in the sense that both the Maori child and the Maori parent should think of them as their own schools, which should teach them to be proud of their past and should also fit them for life in the new pattern.

The revised policy was adopted in 1931, and immediately explained to the Maori parents and elders, whose cooperation was so necessary for its success. The new plans were also fully discussed with the Maori school teachers who welcomed the more enlightened approach to their task. Twenty years have elapsed since the change and it is now possible to make a preliminary evaluation of some of the gains.

Changed Policy Brings Good Results

The first noticeable change was a marked increase in the vitality and working spirit of the Maori schools. When visiting them, one could feel the exciting release of energy first expressed in the performance of Maori songs, dances and crafts and then carried over into the more formal school work, and it became apparent that the schools which had always been respected by the Maoris had now been taken to their hearts and accepted as indeed their own.

The next result of the change in policy was the increased demand for education beyond the elementary stage. In 1941 the first Maori district high school was established in the heart of the Ngatiporou tribe on the East Coast of the North Island. (Note: a district high school is an elementary school with a four year secondary top.) There are, today, eight such schools. It must be remembered that these Maori district high schools are estab-

lished only in predominantly Maori communities. In other small towns and cities, Maori children in increasing numbers have continued their education in the ordinary secondary schools. It will be of interest to American educators to know that the status of a Maori district high school is exactly similar to that of a public district high school which means that both must provide courses for Maori and white children and Maori and white children are enrolled in both. In the Maori district high school the Maori children predominate, and the school is administered by the Education Department and not by one of the local Education Boards. The most outstanding effect has, therefore, been the steady increase in the number of Maori children who continue their education beyond the elementary school. In 1949 the figure had reached 63% of the Maori primary school graduates.

It was in 1940 that, for the first time, four Maori students were admitted to the Wellington Training College, under exactly the same conditions and after meeting the same admission requirements as European students. Since then, the numbers admitted to the five Teachers Training Colleges are as follows:

Year	No. admitted to Training College	No. completing course	No. still teaching
1940	4	4	2
1941	9	9	7
1942	18	16	12
1943	16	12	9
1944	20	17	13
1945	21	17	14
1946	29	24	24
1947	32	28	28
1948	37	31	31
1949	44	38	38
1950	53		
<i>Total</i>	283	196	178

It will be seen that almost all of these students have graduated from Training College with their teaching certificates which give them the full rights of New Zealand teachers. This means that these Maori teachers may, if they wish, apply for and be appointed to positions in any public school in New Zealand, that is, to positions in schools the attendance at which is wholly European. Some do this, but up to the present time, most of them have felt their call to the Maori schools and the Maori children.

In a similar manner, more Maori girls have entered the nursing and school dental nursing professions with credit both to themselves and to their race. There has also been a decided movement of young Maoris from their villages to the larger towns and cities where they find employment in industry and, to a lesser extent, in Government service. I think it is fair to give the schools some credit for this evidence of the Maoris' better adjustment to the social and economic milieu in which they must live. In the main cities this influx of the Maori could have been a greater problem than it is, but, under wise Maori leadership, strong Maori societies have been formed and these provide a place of meeting and support for these young people in their difficult adjustment to city life.

It is, of course, true that other factors than education have been at work during the last twenty years but I feel that education has made no small contribution to the happier adjustment of a people of whom all New Zealanders are proud.

—Douglas G. Ball, deputy director of education, New Zealand.

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