

## Is Māori representation Māori privilege?

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The Māori privilege debate continues to do the rounds.

Over recent years, as I have become more involved in my own tribal activities, it irks me that many communities still cannot get a grasp of the place of mana whenua within the wider community.

This was best played out in my community last year during the New Plymouth District Council Māori Wards referendum that went to the vote, and was resoundingly voted against by 83% of the wider community.

The online and letters-to-the-editor rhetoric in the local Taranaki Daily News reminded me of the 1950s and 60s', "We need to watch out for these uppity Māori". And, amidst the usual diatribe came the, "Why should Māori get special treatment?", and other Māori-privilege comments.

It made me think, are Treaty of Waitangi workshops and cultural responsiveness programmes really hitting the mark at a school level, let alone amongst our wider society? Are they getting us to a place of really seeing Māori as tangata whenua, as mana whenua? It has been 40 years since the beginning of the Māori renaissance of the early 70s — why are we still grappling with these treaty issues? I often think and publically announce that we have come a long way in those 40 years of Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa, Māori Radio, and TV, treaty settlements, but still 83% of my community said No to Māori representation.



And that is the crux of what the Treaty means for us as Māori. Māori are tangata whenua, one of the treaty partner's, though some people still want to dispute that. That partnership gives Māori mana whenua rights and responsibilities. We are not just another member of our multi-cultural society. For Māori, this is our homeland, the only place we can speak our language — an official language — since 1986. The only place we can live our cultural

beliefs, to just be Māori. Other cultures can return to their homeland to speak their language, to live within their culture.

I listened to an old Pākehā pensioner say at one of the public meetings that, ‘We are all one people, and we had no problems with race relations in my time — some of my best friends were Māori’. This is known as “white privilege” — the normalisation of all things determined by a majority culture. Ann Milne, in her paper, “Colouring in the White Spaces” (2009), gives examples of white privilege:

*“In my own life, in the 21st Century white privilege looks like:*

- *Not being expected to speak on the views of all Pākehā New Zealanders*
- *Not being constantly asked how “my people feel about that”*
- *When I buy a car I am not asked if I can really afford it*
- *When I choose to move house, I can choose a neighbourhood that I want to live in*
- *If I am late to a meeting, that doesn’t reflect on all Pākehā*
- *The ability to practice my spiritual beliefs when I choose, not on tap for others*
- *Having several choices of political candidates to choose from”*

And so it goes on; this list is non-exhaustive!

The reality, for Māori, when people say to us “we are all one people” is that we all speak English only, and live a Pākehā life that doesn’t value our identity, language, and culture. In New Plymouth, if Māori parents want their children educated through te reo Māori, there is only one choice, unless they are happy to travel 45 minutes to Opunake. If they want them educated through te reo Pākehā, there are 39 choices. Don’t tell me about Māori privilege.

So, how well are Māori represented in those English-Medium schools? Is what is happening in our wider society being played out in Boards of Trustee (BOD) representation? How can we encourage Māori representation without it being seen as Māori privilege?

The reality is it is hard to be the sole Māori representative on a board, and Māori are not always jumping at the chance to stand. So, school leadership must look at ways to make Māori representation safe and valued.

We must understand that the mana whenua voice is value-added, rather than just there because we are Māori. The mainstream mono-lingual, mono-cultural position is not the only worldview. As we look at the bigger picture and consider Māori values and attitudes to our environment, leadership, economy, staff recruitment, and curriculum content, Māori have a lot to offer at many levels.

Some suggestions:

- Māori representation is a must on boards of trustees.
- A mana whenua voice should be considered as a permanent Board position.
- Begin with the Māori school whānau. The iwi machine is often too hard to work through. Remember, calling whānau hui is not always the answer, but allow that school whānau to determine the best way to meet and engage. Don't let this be dominated by school leadership and teachers; let the whānau lead so that their voice is heard. That group becomes the support basis for Māori representation on the board, and invite them to decide who that will be, or, how their voice should be heard.
- Go on your own journey of understanding the local iwi narratives, plan your own reo journey, and seek the support of mana whenua to determine the tikanga/protocols that are appropriate for your school.

Māori privilege is a myth. When we really understand the history of Aotearoa, we also understand why Māori dominate the negative statistics. But, let's leave learning our own history in the New Zealand curriculum to another blog!



## **Wharehoka Wano**

[Wharehoka Wano](#) As part of the CORE Education team, his role is in ensuring clear communication between the CORE team and the Māori team, and the wider CORE external stakeholders. His strengths are in facilitating, leading and ensuring team members are contributing in areas they have strengths.