

We rise — we fall

Participants in the maori education conference at Ngaruawahia recently have been given two views of the achievements of maori students — one depressing, the other optimistic. Both views were based on official statistics. In a key note address, Director-General of Education Bill Renwick produced statistics to show that maori students were performing much better now than 20 years ago, although he acknowledged areas of continuing concern. But in a discussion paper studied by conference-goers, Hillary College, Otara, teacher Ian Mitchell also produced statistics that to him were "horrible" and a "record of abysmal failure".

The following two articles look at the two points of view...

It was "most fortunate" that public discussions of the achievements of maori students concentrated so much on those who were failing, according to Director-General of Education Bill Renwick.

In a keynote address to the Maori education conference at Ngaruawahia's Turangawaewae marae in March, Mr Renwick acknowledged there were "far too many" failures.

"But there are also successes," he told his audience.

He said that over the last 25 years, thousands of maori students had been encouraged to stay at school or go on to higher education.

Many were themselves now parents, able to guide their children through the education system better than previous generations of maori parents were.

"The best of these students are of outstanding quality," Mr Renwick said, and cited the increased money set aside this year to enable more Ngarimu scholarships to be awarded. Among the applicants were prefects, house captains, duxes, speech contestants and sports team leaders.

Mr Renwick cited statistics which showed that maori secondary pupils were achieving considerably more now than 20 years ago.

- The number of maori secondary pupils had jumped more than 300 per cent, from 9432 to 29,923 in 1982. Non-maori students increased only 47 per cent.

- 77 per cent of maori school leavers came from the fifth, sixth and seventh forms in 1982, compared with only 42 per cent in 1962.

- 23.7 per cent of maori school leavers in 1982 had passed at least three subjects in School Certificate, compared with 11.5 per cent in 1968.

- 8.2 per cent left school with University Entrance or better in 1982, compared with 2.6 per cent in 1968.

Despite these achievements, Mr Renwick acknowledged that the problem



arose when comparisons were made between maori and pakeha pupils' achievements.

"The gap between maori and pakeha is closing," he said. "But it is taking longer to close than any of us expected."

Figures which demonstrated this were that in 1968, 38 non-maori pupils left school with Sixth Form Certificate or better for every one maori student.

In 1982 the comparable ratio was 15 to one — but on a pro rata population basis, the ratio should have been seven or eight to one.

Mr Renwick concluded that the education system was in much better shape to adequately cater for maori, needs than it had been in the past.

However, he said there were "good grounds for believing that the present inequalities will be further reduced by the end of this decade."

Among important developments now taking place was that "for the first time in our history we are facing up to the prospect of including aspects of taha maori, not as an option or an after-thought, but as an essential part of school programmes for all New Zealanders," Mr Renwick said.

It was "unthinkable" that the pakeha tolerate failure rates being experienced by maori pupils in School Certificate, according to Hillary College, Otara, teacher Ian Mitchell.

"If pakeha students got consistent failure rates of 82, 84 and 88 per cent in national examinations, the examination system itself would be very quickly blamed and either abolished or adapted to ensure pakeha success," he wrote.

Mr Mitchell made these claims in a discussion paper for the maori education development conference at Ngaruawahia's Turangawaewae marae in March.

Mr Mitchell cited statistics of pass and fail rates in School Certificate to back his claim that they were a "continuing record of abysmal failure".

- In 1980 64.1 per cent of maori pupils left school with no qualifications, compared with only 27.9 per cent of pakeha pupils.

- Only 9.3 per cent of maori pupils left school with University Entrance or better, compared with 34.3 per cent of pakeha.

- In 1982, 69 per cent of maori School Certificate candidates failed their papers, compared with 43 per cent of the pakeha.

- 74 per cent of maori pupils who sat geography failed.

- 73 per cent failed English.

- 66 per cent failed science.

- 64 per cent failed mathematics.

- 84 per cent failed agriculture, 84 per cent failed home economics, 82 per cent failed engineering shopwork, and 88 per cent failed clothing.

"There has been no overall or significant improvement in the past 10 years," despite Education Department assurances to the contrary, Mr Mitchell claimed.

"Nor is there likely to be an improvement, because all School Certificate is, is a good measurement of cultural difference. It sorts out very well those students who do not share middle-class pakeha cultural values and attitudes," he wrote.

He quoted from a magazine article which claimed that "hardly any of the exam papers even mention anything to do with maori or Polynesian people".

He said teachers and administrators would not admit there was a cultural bias in the examination that allowed children of pakeha culture to succeed, preferring instead to blame the victims for their failure.