

Maori Woman Teacher represents NZ at Switzerland Conference

From approximately 18,500 Teachers in State Primary and Intermediate Schools the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) for the first time in 100 years asked a Maori woman teacher Kura Taylor to be its International Consultation Nominee, at a conference in Switzerland last year.

The six weeks before leaving New Zealand were very busy weeks indeed, crammed with background reading from the World Conference of the Organisations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP), UNESCO, Department of Maori Affairs, NZEI, Race Relations Office, and friends; arrangements for passport, money and clothes; completing 1500 word assignments for Massey University papers; sitting a three-hour Diploma in Teaching examination; initiating an Acting-Secretary for the Auckland Branch NZEI one of the largest branches in New Zealand; domestic arrangements and of course, teaching full-time.

Preliminaries

Finally all the preliminaries were completed. Into the hand-tooled leather wallet from Arahina MWWL went the travel documents arranged by NZEI and the travellers cheques representing the money which from the Department of Maori Affairs and the Taranaki Maori Trust Board. Into my luggage went the gowns and garments with the koru patterns from Mahia Wilson, Babs Pedersen and Ramai Hayward and the gown with Toi Maihi's "kakariki" design; the Toi Maihi personalised "kuaka" note-paper and name cards; enough mementoes (kete, poi poi, wall hangings, bookmarks) from Ruapotaka MWWL and Mahia Wilson for everyone connected with the Consultation and those who hosted me in London, Hong Kong, Geneva and Paris; two New Zealand desk flags from Arahina MWWL; my best kete, my mako earrings, my pounamu, and "Te Raukura"; and most important of all, the taonga to be presented to WCOTP on behalf of the NZEI.

The taonga named "Te Wakahuia o te Whanau" — (Treasure Chest of the New Zealand Bi-cultural Family) — was carved by Morgan Puru of Te Unga Waka MWWL. Bedded in the wakahuia lay "Te Raukura o Te Atiawa" and the "Three Baskets of Knowledge" all blessed by the Rev. Ruawai Rakana.

I was on my way leaving New Zealand shores for the first time physically alone but spiritually strong, bound for the Hotel du Mont Blanc, Morges, Switzerland.

Touch-down

Travel and arrival was a mass of strange sounds, strange routines, strange expectations and wonderful warm people.

The Consultation began at 9.00 in the morning and continued until at least 11.00 at night. Discussions were in both French and English with simultaneous translation.

During the morning session on the first day

there were introductions with the reading of curriculum vitae, statements of the purpose of the Consultation, and the receiving of the five working papers.

In the afternoon the Consultation President and Rapporteurs were elected and inducted. How did I feel being elected to the Chair without any warning at all? Trapped — totally inadequate and with absolutely no one to run to and nowhere to hide knowing full well that for the Mana of the People and the NZEI I had to smile and accept graciously. I opened with a mihi and at every opportunity after that introduced or drew a parallel with things Maori as I know them.

Personal service

During the consultation we were each required to make a statement about teacher experiences and studies related to education for peace, disarmament and respect for human rights. In summary I talked about the NZEI, its services to Education and its code of:-

... "personal service to others through concern for and responsible promotion of the education and welfare of children, students and teachers"....

In the matter of wars and peace education I spoke about us being geographically insulated and isolated by distance; sending our young men to seven wars; 25th April ANZAC remembrances; RSA and poppy day; allegiance to the flag; being part of the Commonwealth; the Maori People's pilgrimage to the theatres of battle and our appreciation of the care given to the graves of New Zealand's war dead. I referred to nuclear testing in the Pacific and visits of nuclear powered shipping to New Zealand ports.

Shared control

Within the New Zealand education system I spoke about compulsory education from 6 to 15 years; control and administration of Primary and Secondary Schools; liaison with our Pre-school education centres. I pointed out that we as teachers enjoyed continuous consultation with those in authority on curriculum and administrative matters and as a result the opportunities of both Teachers and members of the public to share in shaping and reviewing the syllabus of instruction for Primary and Intermediate Schools. I talked about there being as yet only one official language — English — (great surprise) but that there were this year four official experimental English/Maori bi-lingual schools. I mentioned also the NZEI report on Maori Education "Te Tatai Hono" which had just been published for discussion.



The carved treasure-chest, a gift from the NZEI.

Key component

I talked about our firm belief in the skill of the teacher to teach as the key component in sustained learning and the need for Teacher Training programmes in Maori to be expanded. I talked about our Teacher Exchanges; Teacher's College visits to Japan and Australia; Wales, USA etc.; Colombo plan students; the resources available from the New Zealand Foundation for Peace Studies; our Social Studies programmes and the direction of those programmes towards an appreciation of basic human rights.

I mentioned our welfare state and the many different voluntary welfare organisations which cater for those in need and the voluntary cultural organisations which formed a support structure for people of different ethnic groups. I talked about the family and the community — values, attitudes and beliefs.

I commented that while New Zealand's race relations were sometimes said by some to be the best in the world they remained only as good as those of us in New Zealand society who were prepared to listen to each other and to work at relationships even when we didn't want to, and that it appeared that the minority groups had to work the hardest.

I spoke about Maori issues and the demand of Maori people for self-determination, and I referred to Tu Tangata programmes currently being encouraged through the Department of Maori Affairs and the growing political awareness of the Maori People.