

New Zealand

Robyn Gray

July 16th-23rd, 2004

I was very fortunate to be selected to travel to New Zealand and study Aboriginal Education. The experience that I had has provided me with an educational insight into another country that one is only able to experience under certain conditions. The conditions that I speak of include living arrangements, the focus of the expedition, and the model in which I received the information.

Dede DeRose (my travelling partner from Kamloops) and I was billeted by, Mere Berryman, a Maori researcher who is employed by the Ministry of Education. Her professional background was that of a classroom teacher. Mere provided an experience that was broad-based and inclusive of Maori and Kiwi culture.

The three weeks that Dede and I were in New Zealand was spent in a variety of ways. The first weekend included our arrival and a Sunday trip to the Auckland Museum. Our hostess, Mere, thought this would provide us with some historical background. We spent the better part of the day in the Maori section. Afterward, we left Auckland and arrived in Mount Maunganui on the eastside of the North Island, our homebase.

The following workweek included visiting James Cook Secondary School where the Maori research team was working with their educators on the Te Kotahitanga Project. (This project was our main focus throughout our study.) Secondly, we spent two days on the Marae, located in Tauranga, where the research team provided us with a profound cultural experience that included an overview of their project. During last two days of this week, we visited three schools in Rotorua and Hamilton. All three were highly immersed in the implementation of the project. Lastly, we visited Waikato University and met with the university researchers related to the Te Kotahitanga Project.

During the weekend, our hostess toured us around the Coromandel Peninsula. The panoramic views were incredible as well as the visit to a macadamia-nut farm. The highlight of this event included a boatride around the Hauraki Gulf where we had the pleasure of viewing birds, penguins, and oyster farms.

The second workweek included visiting four more high schools North of Auckland. We continued to learn more about the Te Kotahitanga Project. This initiative came from a research question that mainly looked at how Maori students could be more successful in mainstream schooling. Six groups and their collaborative dialogues were conducted and collated. The six groups consisted of Maori students (successful and not so successful), their parents (two separate groups), teachers, and the administrative team. Once the research was analyzed, the second stage of the project was implemented. This included looking at elements of an effective teaching process and providing a framework that involved 12 various school sites. These were the schools that we were exposed to and had the opportunity to view the project in action.

The last part of the week included some interesting site seeing. We visited the township of Russell where the Waitangi Treaty was signed in 1847, and presently, represents all of New Zealand Maori peoples today. The Waipoua Forest on the eastside of the island was our next stop of the island. We were awed by the 2000 year old Kauri tree called the Tani Mahuta (God of the Forest). The countryside was lush and green and varied depending on whether we were near the coastline or further inland.

The second weekend included insight into the Kiwi popular culture. We spent time shopping in malls and enjoyed running in the "Lord of the Run" mini-marathon in Hamilton. Sunday included a birthday dinner at a local buffet-style restaurant and watching the Black's Rugby Team perform the Haka. We soon realized that the young Maori mens' performance of the Haka at school sites was far more authentic than the national team's version.

Our last week in New Zealand included a small trip to Whakatane and Opotiki. We spent a couple of days visiting a Kaupapa Maori school called Waioweka. This school was primary and intermediate and had many cultural experiences for the children. All instruction was in Maori medium. Two members of the research team became our hosts. They were both fluent in Maori and provided us with a real insight into the variation between Kaupapa Maori schools and mainstream schools. Also, they were young university educated Maori individuals who were able to discuss their schooling experiences in male and female boarding schools.

Our last weekend consisted of visiting our local area. We hiked around and up Mount Maunaganui and said our last good-byes to our host family.

In summary, the experience I had in New Zealand has had a profound impact on how I view education and culture. Formally, I could not imagine schools that were influenced by British tradition having Maori culture incorporated within them. The fact that secondary schools in New Zealand acknowledge their Indigenous inhabitants and have a marae at each school site is very powerful. Also, the Te Kotahitanga Project provided a model for research possibilities. I now believe that there are many things that we could do differently in British Columbia with regard to Aboriginal Education. Moreover, I will continue to pursue the possibilities available that will enhance the education for our Aboriginal learners, culturally and academically.

(Please refer to the Power Point for the rest of my discussion)