

Mā wai ngā hua? 'Participation' in Early Childhood in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Introduction

In response to concern about educational 'disparities,' the New Zealand Ministry of Education has introduced a number of programmes "targeting inequalities" (Ministry of Education, 2005), including since 2001, the "Promoting Early Childhood Participation Project (PPP)," which "targets" communities with large Māori and Pacific Island peoples. Whilst this approach can be seen as a well-intentioned attempt to redress a historical imbalance, alternatively, it could also be viewed as a means of off-loading the responsibility for dealing with the issues to community groups. The wide-ranging contextual issues for this "non-participation," such as poor quality and culturally inappropriate early childhood provision are sidestepped, as is the underlying racism that is the ongoing legacy of the history of colonisation in this country. Racism has served historically to normalise and legitimise Eurocentric dominance (Davies, Nandy, & Sardar, 1993). It has ongoing hegemonic power effects that undermine moves towards anti-colonial transformations. Post-colonial critique of the imposition of Eurocentrism in neo-colonial policy and practice, can open up possibilities for respectful validation of historically oppressed ways of being, knowing, and doing (Spivak as cited in Hickling-Hudson, 2006; Martin, 2007).

Addressing "Disparities"

The international policy agenda of 'Equality for All,' promoted by the World Bank and other donor organizations, considers that "Early childhood development can play a vital role in giving poor children a solid start on learning achievement and putting them on an equal footing with their richer cohorts in terms of their physical, social, and cognitive development" (World Bank, 2002, p. 27). In New Zealand, this discourse has focussed on perceived 'disparities' in outcomes for different ethnic groups, and in particular, Māori, the Indigenous peoples. A recent government report confirms that Māori are "disproportionately represented in lower socioeconomic strata (for example, lower income, no

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qualifications, no car access)” and that there are “widening inequalities in socioeconomic resources between Māori and non-Māori” (Ministry of Health, 2006, p. xii). This is particularly concerning given that we have had for the past decade a Labour-led government which has traditionally claimed to be sympathetic to Māori. An area of ongoing and increasing disparity between Māori and non-Māori is that of participation within early childhood education. Research commissioned by the government’s Ministry of Māori Development/Te Puni Kōkiri identified that “disparities between Māori and non-Māori participation in early childhood services grew between 1991 and 1998” (Newell, 2000). Consequently, the “Promoting Early Childhood Participation Project (PPP)” has “targeted communities with a high proportion of Māori and Pasifika children and low early childhood education participation rates” (Ministry of Education, 2005, p.124-5), by contracting local facilitators to encourage ‘non-participating’ families to locate and enroll in an early childhood education service. The Project contracts community groups to identify ‘non-participating’ families, addressing their reasons for non-participation, and supporting them to participate.

In 2005 a Ministerial review acknowledged that “There is limited evidence on the effectiveness of PPP. Monitoring data indicates that the programme is successful, but no evaluation has been carried out” (Ministry of Education, 2005). Since 2001 when it began, PPP has received \$4.350m in ongoing annual funding within the education budget. In 2005 there were 25 PPP contracts to the value of \$1.227m, which aimed to reach 1233 children. In 2004/05, there was an “under-spend” on PPP due to understaffing in the key Ministry region for PPP, delays caused by implementing new contracting processes, difficulties in identifying communities where PPP would be the most appropriate intervention, and difficulty in finding appropriate providers. The review reports that there is anecdotal evidence that the PPP has contributed “to increased awareness and understanding of ECE in communities that have had PPP projects. Ministry of Education iwi’ partners, in particular, have reported significant change in the status of ECE in their communities as a result of PPP projects” (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Whilst the Participation Project is an attempt at ‘reducing inequalities,’ it is unlikely to easily rectify the scars of a legacy of colonisation, which has included policies that resulted, for example, in decades of Māori children being hit for speaking their own language in schools. In 1900, over 90% of Māori new entrants spoke Māori as their first language. In 1905, the Inspector of Native Schools issued an instruction that resulted in the punishment of children for speaking Māori for the next fifty years. The salience of messages such as this is evident in that by 1960 only 26% of young Māori children were fluent in their own language (Walker, 2004). The loss of their language had implications for Māori children’s ability to access discourses that afforded them a positive sense

of identity, since “Te reo Māori serves as the medium through which symbolic and cultural components are properly united and Māoriness most appropriately expressed” (Durie, 1997, p. 152).

“Targetting” is an unfortunate terminology, as is the notion of “inequalities.” This language positions Māori in deficit mode as a marginalised, dispossessed underclass, and in the ‘firing line’ of supposedly “well-intentioned” policies (Delpit, 1988; Simon, 1996), which nevertheless set Māori up to fail by seeking to measure them by ‘mainstream’ standards. The Participation Project, whilst ostensibly seeking to align ‘non-attending’ families with available early childhood education services, operates from a position of denial with regard to the historical reasons for Māori disinterest in the services provided. In 1984, activist Donna Awatere wrote in her treatise, *“Māori Sovereignty”*, that there was a sign, visible only to Māori, above each kindergarten, Playcentre, school, or university which reads, “Māori Keep Out: For White Use Only” (p. 21). She went on to write that because non-Māori cannot see the sign, for them it does not exist, and they therefore see no need to take it down. Colleagues who have been involved as facilitators within Participation Project contracts have reported that for many Māori families this perception is still salient—they see Kōhanga Reo (Māori language early childhood programs) as being the early childhood provider for Māori families and therefore don’t consider the possibility of attending the other early childhood services. In the same year that Donna Awatere produced *“Māori Sovereignty,”* Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1984) wrote that being visibly Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand means being exposed to racism on a daily basis. She saw racism as part of the fabric of our society, “a reality that leaks into the consciousness of every inhabitant of Aotearoa, as victim, or antagonist, acquiescent or aggressive” (p. 244).

Early Childhood and Identity

Kōhanga Reo was developed by Māori, for Māori, initially funded as a pilot project under the auspices of the Māori Affairs Department in 1981. It was a response to recognition that the state education system, in its prohibition of the use of te reo Māori, had contributed to the jeopardisation of the ongoing viability of the language. Māori families initially enthusiastically supported the Kōhanga movement which grew rapidly to the point that by 1993, nearly half (49.2%) of Māori early childhood enrollments were within Kōhanga Reo. However, Kōhanga Reo enrolments have trended downwards over recent years (Ministry of Education, 2004; Te Puni Kōkiri/Ministry of Māori Development, 1999, 2001) while the proportion of Māori children participating in education and care centres has increased (Ministry of Social Development, 2003). In July 2002, enrolments of Māori children in Kōhanga Reo were only 32% of all Māori enrolments in early childhood education. This means that two-thirds (68%) of

Māori children who attend an early childhood service are enrolled in settings other than Kōhanga Reo.

Early childhood services other than Kōhanga Reo, have generally paid only token lip-service to integrating Māori ways of being, knowing, and doing within their curriculum and practice, thereby incapacitating Māori children's ability to access Māori subjectivities through the educational opportunities provided. This lack of validation of Māori children's Māoriness is in effect a denial of their right to access, within the state-funded education system, a positive identity as Māori. Furthermore, it serves to reinforce Pākehā ethnocentrism and affirm Pākehā cultural dominance, whilst creating an inequitable situation in which Māori children are constantly being judged by Pākehā/Western standards (Simon, 1996). Opportunities denied in the early childhood years have lifelong implications, according to Māori academic Mason Durie (2001), who considers that Māori children should exercise their rights to enjoy their lives simultaneously as Māori and as citizens of the world. He considers that for "many Māori children and other New Zealanders [who] are unable to participate in early childhood education because of cost, location, and cultural distance, [t]heir future participation in other areas of society are likely to be similarly compromised" (Durie, 2003, p. 6). It is this issue of "cultural distance" that is of interest to our discussion. Government discourse which focuses on socio-economic deprivation, the consequent accessibility, and affordability issues (Ministry of Health, 2006; Newell, 2000) is locating the 'problem' with the families, a deficit discourse that ignores the likely agency of those who may choose not to take their children to services that do not make them feel welcome or meet their needs for education and care that is culturally validating.

The Challenge of Te Reo and Tikanga Māori as 'Quality Components'

Containing possibilities around an alternative framing to the deficit discourse of deprivation, the Ministry of Education's (2002) ten-year strategic plan for early childhood education, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki*, was developed by a working party representative of and in consultation with the wider early childhood community. It outlines three goals: increased participation in quality early childhood education (ECE) services; improved quality of ECE services; and promotion of collaborative relationships. The plan includes specific strategies for building an ECE sector responsive to the needs of Māori and Pacific peoples, including "a focus on collaborative relationships for Māori," which seeks to "create an environment where the wider needs of Māori children, their parents, and whānau (families) are recognized and acknowledged," where opportunities are generated for whānau, hapū, and iwi to work with early childhood services, and early childhood services are encouraged to become more responsive to the needs of Māori children (p.16).

Research on the aspirations of Māori families shows that even those who send their children to ‘mainstream’ early childhood centres and schools, rather than to Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa,ⁱⁱ still want their children to learn their language and expect that their children will have opportunities for this within that educational setting (AGB-McNair, 1992; Durie, 2001; Else, 1997; Te Puni Kōkiri/Ministry of Māori Development, 1998). Māori aspirations for their language and culture go hand in hand with tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) exercised through whānau (family) support structures (Smith, 1997, p. 448). The majority (93.1 %) of early childhood teachers working in services other than Kōhanga Reo are not Māori (Ministry of Education, 2004) and do not speak Māori or have an in-depth understanding of tikanga Māori (Māori culture and values). A recent survey (Harkess, 2004) found that only 1% of non-Māori early childhood teachers use the Māori language more than 30% of their teaching time. Although 75% of Pākehāⁱⁱⁱ early childhood teachers use some Māori whilst teaching, 70% of these teachers described themselves as speaking Māori “not very well.” This raises questions about the communicative competence (Philips, 1993) in te reo Māori of the majority of early childhood teachers in this country. Given that demographic projections indicate “that by 2040 the majority of children in our early childhood centres and primary schools will be Māori and Pasifika” (Ministry of Education, 2003), ‘mainstream’ early childhood practice faces a huge transformation if it is to become more responsive to and reflective of Indigeneity and honouring of linguistic and cultural diversity.

The Minister of Education responsible for establishing the PPP, Trevor Mallard, stated in 2001, shortly after their initiation, that “feedback to date from the Promoting Participation project is underlining the importance of access to quality services” (Mallard, 2001). As early as 1988 a government-commissioned report into early childhood education had identified access to “te reo and tikanga Māori” as one of their list of identifiable characteristics of “good quality” early childhood services (Meade, 1988). The 1996 promulgation of our first national and bicultural early childhood curriculum, Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996), held promise that this aspiration might one day be delivered although the reality of bicultural curriculum delivery is still an ongoing journey (Ritchie, 2003a, 2003b, 2005a; Ritchie & Rau, 2006). A fundamental dilemma in the delivery of a ‘quality’ early childhood curriculum arises from recognition of the limited extent to which non-Māori, the vast majority of whom lack an in-depth knowledge of the Māori language and culture, are capable of honouring authentically the indigenous content that is stipulated. Internationally, early childhood discourses relating to ‘quality’ provision are being challenged to move away from hegemonic, universalized, homogenised ‘best practice’ models to instead attend to the “many good ways” of culturally-centred educational pedagogies (Pence, 1998, p. 27).

Concerns of Educators

Voices from some of our recent research^{iv} may serve to illuminate this critique of PPP, focusing on issues around ‘non-participation,’ in terms of the ‘quality’ of cultural validation within early childhood programmes, and possible reasons for the lack of authenticity of Māori content. Co-researchers in recent studies (Ritchie, 2002; Ritchie & Rau, 2006) were somewhat despairing of the extent to which the bicultural intentions of Te Whāriki are being delivered. Anahera, a Māori teacher educator, expressed her concern about the lack of progress over the past decade:

I mean we all must be a bit disappointed in the lack of progress in bicultural practices. You know it hasn't really gone that fast has it?... I could ask this question to you: In honesty did we think that in ten years time we'd be up to this stage or a whole lot further along the track?

Riana, a Māori kindergarten head teacher, stated that she supported the research kaupapa, because: “I have concerns about how Te Whāriki is actually delivered for the tamariki and for those whānau.” Several co-researchers considered that whilst many early childhood centres may have implemented some well-intentioned practices, these remained at a fairly surface level, as environmental embellishments or token use of Māori words, rather than emanating from a philosophical base that reflected a deep knowledge of and commitment to Māori values. Ariel, a Pākehā teacher educator, reflected that

Just recently I've been going out [visiting students on practicum], and I still see it as being quite superficial in a lot of areas. Like they're putting in the ‘right words’ and things like that in, but it's not actually being integrated as part of what happens within a centre.

Anne, a very experienced Pākehā kindergarten head teacher, held a similar view, considering that in many centres, educators attempts remained at the level of environmental add-ons: “This often amounts to a veneer of biculturalism. It's an outward appearance only. There is often nothing more. I suppose that's called tokenism.”

An important distinction can be made between employing superficial cultural icons, such as songs or dress-ups clothing within the early childhood programme, and moving much further to include deeper signifiers such as culturally-specific patterns of interaction and emotion, philosophical conceptions, and childrearing practices (Clark, 1995). When Māori content

remains marginalised within an education setting, this perpetuates a perception of a de-valuing of Te Ao Māori (Māori world views) that has been a cornerstone of the colonisation experience. Irihapeti Ramsden (1994) considers that “colonisation is continued by the selective co-option of Māori ideas and rituals which become redefined, stereotyped, and rigidified” (p. 21).

Racism underlies the pattern of uneven power relations created by the British colonisers’ assumption and perpetuation of sovereignty, which has undermined Māori authority structures and debased their world view (Ballara, 1986; Jackson, 1992; Smith, 1999; Walker, 1990). Racism constitutes an insidious undercurrent that has permeated our colonial history. It is intrinsically implicated in the structuring and organization of institutions and discourses and in the way that rationality (economic, individual, group and ‘good sense’) has been constructed (Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

In a previous study (Ritchie, 2002), early childhood educators and academics had shared stories and experiences highlighting negative aspects of racism within early childhood centres (summarized in Ritchie, 2005b). These included negative remarks by educators and parents, such as in generalized assumptions of poor parenting skills of Māori families, or a lack of effort by educators to pronounce Māori children’s names correctly. An ongoing expression of racism in Aotearoa is seen in the way Māori continue to be characterised as ‘the problem’ and blamed for their lack of educational achievement, poor social and health indicators, and in this case, lack of participation in early childhood services. As Raj Vasil has written, “Clearly, the Pākehā argument is that the Māori have only themselves to blame for their lack of education and skills and [for] constituting mostly the underclass” (p. 33). Since Māori poverty and lack of achievement are seen as self-manufactured and self-inflicted, Pākehā have no reason to feel guilty or seek to rectify this situation (1988). In this context, the PPP could be considered to reflect a resurgence of the ‘blame the victim’ discourse prevalent in the 1960s (Smith, 1997).

This covert racism is characteristic of the ways in which Pākehā have historically enacted their beliefs in white racial superiority (Belich, 2001, p. 224). Pākehā educators, “cushioned by the comfortable white privilege of whiteness” (Lewis, Ketter, & Fabos, 2001), are able to exercise choice as to the extent to which they included te reo me ngā tikanga Māori (Māori language and culture) within their teaching. This authority arises from their institutional positioning as educators, exercising power, and privilege within Pākehā dominated institutions, where Pākehā/Western constructions are ‘normal.’ The power of dominant discourses makes it hard to acknowledge one’s complicity and positionality (MacNaughton, 1998). Embeddedness within existing power relations makes it difficult for Pākehā to move beyond this paradigm and imagine a different way of operating (Bell, 1992). In our studies, we can identify

the enactment of what Joyce E. King (1994) has termed “dysconscious racism,” whereby Pākehā early childhood educators are part of a wider manifestation of hegemonic acceptance of Pākehā/Western normalcy. Unless a critical consciousness is applied, educators continue to demonstrate ways of being that reflect colonial/neo-colonial assumptions of white superiority, inadvertently “subordinating diverse others” (p. 338).

Māori early childhood educators within our studies applied post-colonial tools to analyse the power effects that they experienced. Post-colonial, Kaupapa Māori, and Mana Wāhine critical theorising enables Māori women to articulate their positionings within colonized realities, re-framing an anti-colonial political positioning (Rau, 2007). Pania, a Māori colleague, viewed Pākehā educators as reluctant to hand over to Māori the power and control that would enable them to make their own decisions. Pākehā, she believes, are:

still not allowing Māori to determine, they’re still not handing over, they still want to have the control. They see the support as the controlling still.... they are not endeavouring to bring Māori forward and put Māori into those positions to actually determine their own pathway collaboratively.

Language is powerful (Lakoff, 1990), and those in more powerful positions may be less motivated to examine their employment of language as an instrument of power, but power is expressed in other ways as well. People may be unaware of the subtle ways in which they exert power, such as the symbolic power exhibited in ways of looking, sitting, standing, and even keeping silent (for example ‘reproachful looks,’ ‘tones,’ or ‘disapproving glances’) (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 24), the ways these messages are utilised by the powerful to reinforce existing power dynamics, and positions of privilege.

In our recent study (Ritchie & Rau, 2006), Katerina, a Māori teacher educator, explained her perceptions from the point of view of a shy Mori ‘Mama’ approaching an early childhood centre for the first time:

Well if you sit behind the desk, I’m not going to feel comfortable. If you’re teaching my babies and you have the privilege of hanging out with my babies, I need you to get away from that desk and come out in front of the desk and sit down with me and just talk as two Mamas, or two women who are having a cup of tea, and like real cups of tea too! Not when you sit there and you know it’s so stiff and formal that nobody wants to talk. It’s all very polite, and you walk away, and the whānau walk away feeling like they’ve got nothing out of it, no real connection. I need to connect with you because you are in that position of power. They’re my babies, but you’re the

teacher. You need to connect with me because I see you with the power.

Katerina's analysis is consistent with the current theorising of Gunilla Dahlberg and colleagues (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Dahlberg considers the art of really listening and hearing what the other is saying to be central to what she describes as "the ethics of encounter" (Dahlberg, 2000, p. 23). So, for Katerina, the powerfully positioned Pākehā teacher has the responsibility to move out of her comfort zone in order to fully welcome Māori into the early childhood centre.

Even when individuals try to identify and counter racism, the power of hegemonic power effects and pervasiveness of embedded discourses obviate this process. Paul Spoonley (1988) considers that "however much individual teachers or schools wish to avoid being racist, if the surrounding society is racist, then the impact of their endeavours will be circumscribed and probably undermined" (p. 43). The complex legacy of colonization and embedded racism manifests at multiple sites and levels, including both personal interactions and institutional activities. It has been argued that to transform the curriculum beyond mere token Māori representation will require a preceding/simultaneous transformation of community power relations (Kaomea, 2004).

Māori Aspirations and Agency

Throughout the history of colonisation in Aotearoa, Māori have exercised agency. "Māori did not passively receive Europe but actively engaged with it. They chose, adjusted, and repackaged the new, in many respects, into a less culturally damaged form. They did so with courage and perceptiveness" (Belich, 1996, p. 154). The Native Schools, which ran from 1867-1969, were set up "with a clear mission to bring Māori into the fold of European civilisation" (Simon & Smith, 2001, p. 309). Māori teachers and students nevertheless generated innovative pedagogies that were reflective of Māori values and needs, in effect, transforming the Native Schools into a rural whānau support system.

Data from a colleague who facilitated a PPP contract demonstrates a similar sense of determination to tailor government provision towards meeting community needs. Anahera spoke of the challenge of meeting the Ministry's 'target' numbers:

and then at the bottom of the contract in little writing was you need to find a hundred child not participating in early childhood in a year. Unmanageable! One hundred! You've got to be joking. It's going to take me six months to develop

relationships, just to be able to kōrero... It was huge. We did it, but ... for me it wasn't sustainable.

Anahera focussed her interviews with families on their “moemoea” or aspirations, and found that there was a need for early childhood teacher education qualifications in her rural area. It was then that she was able to follow up by organising for delivery of a diploma programme within that area:

I probably manoeuvred the participation contract around when I [was] interviewing whānau. I asked the question: “What’s your moemoea. What would you like to do?” [A mother] said “I want your job.” So I said “that’s cool, you want to be an early childhood teacher?” and she said “Yes and I want the training here.” I said “Well you go to the whānau, and you see how many of you want that.” [As a result...] we have seven teachers that have their diplomas, all employed and all in [this area]. That’s good.... And it came out of the participation contract”

This can be read as a re-framing of a deficit model discourse into delivery which enables Māori to determine and deliver on their own needs and aspirations.

The challenge to maintain the momentum towards honouring indigeneity in early childhood education can be seen to be particularly daunting given current trends in the political climate in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In 2005, as a response to right-wing opposition party challenges critical of ‘race-based policies’,^v the New Zealand Government has “reviewed its ethnically targeted policies and programmes to ensure they and the government resources that go with them, are allocated according to need”—not ‘race’ (Ministry of Education, 2006). The State Services Commission review (2005) recommended that the focus of the Promoting Early Childhood Participation Project be changed to communities of low participation in ECE, regardless of their ethnicity. As a result of this recommendation, the Ministry of Education (2006) states that “the Promoting Participation Project will now target communities with low early childhood education participation regardless of ethnicity... Māori and Pasifika communities are over-represented in communities of low early childhood education participation and are likely to continue to receive support through the project.” This represents a shift from previous government policy discourse that had for some years seen a burgeoning acknowledgement of historical obligations to Māori with respect to the 1840 Tiriti o Waitangi. In signing this treaty, Māori allowed for British governance of their lands in return for certain stipulated protections, one of which, in Article III, reinforces the intention of the Crown to protect Māori interests and extends to them the same rights and privileges as British subjects (Sharp, 2001). Article III has served as a lever whereby Māori had sought policies to rectify the marginalising impacts of colonization. The

move towards changing policies to focus on need rather than ethnicity can be seen as side-stepping Tiriti-based obligations, ignoring the primacy of indigenous peoples of this country and subsequent dispossession by dint of government legislation, policies, and practices in education and elsewhere.

Conclusion

The community groups operating PPP contracts are required to recruit ‘non-participating’ families and address their reasons for non-participation, supporting them to participate in available early childhood services (Ministry of Education, 2005). Whilst ostensibly ‘well-intentioned’ (Delpit, 1988; Simon, 1996), a post-colonial critique of such policy implementation might view these aims as perpetuating a kind of neo-colonial “benevolent imperialism” (Spivak as cited in Mead, 1996). The assumption that community groups will be able to “address the reasons for non-participation” is optimistic, given the complexities of the lives of people in socio-economically depressed communities. Also underlying these stated aims of the PPP is another assumption, that quality, culturally validating early childhood services are locally available and affordable to these families. Early childhood colleagues in our research studies have expressed their concerns about the delivery of early childhood programmes, given that as Linda Mead (1996) has written, for Māori women, “The problem is not, therefore, one of being able to voice, but of the authority which is accorded such voice, or, put another way, the problem of being heard” (p. 108).

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ⁱ Iwi are tribes.

- ii Kura Kaupapa are schools which are based on Kaupapa Māori, or Māori philosophy, and teach through the medium of te reo Māori, following a document called Te Aho Matua as their philosophical guide (Smith, 1997).
- iii Pākehā are New Zealanders of European ancestry.
- iv Data in this section are drawn from two recent studies (Ritchie, 2002; Ritchie & Rau, 2006), which employed qualitative, narrative methodologies, utilising cotheorising dialogue to collaborate with participants/co-researchers in analysing data. We would like to acknowledge the support of the Teaching Learning Research Initiative, administered by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research in funding our recent research.
- v ‘Race-based’ is a term that has been coined recently to denigrate policies which can also be read as ‘affirmative action,’ or alternately, as honouring historical obligations contained within Te Tiriti o Waitangi to protect the status and interests of Māori as tangata whenua, the Indigenous people of this country. The phrase ‘race-based,’ with its biological determinist connotations, is strangely out of kilter with more usual contemporary terminology that focuses on ethnicities and cultural differences. In seeking to generate a discourse of egalitarianism, it acts in denial of the historical impacts of colonisation.

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