A sociology ‘of’ or a sociology ‘for’ education? The New Zealand experience of the dilemma

Elizabeth Rata*

School of Critical Studies in Education, Faculty of Education, University of Auckland, New Zealand

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The sociology of education in New Zealand, as in other countries, is affected by the dilemma inherent to the discipline, namely: is it a sociology of education or a sociology for education? In this article I analyse three factors in which the dilemma is played out: ‘cultural oppositionism’ in the indigenous (kaupapa Maori) approach, critical policy research and the role of empirical research. I argue that a sociology for education is fundamentally weakened by its politicisation, a flaw not helped by the difficulties in drawing political goals from moral imperatives. In contrast a sociology of education, which uses the strengths of empirical research and theoretical analysis, offers the better hope of renewal for, what is, in New Zealand, a moribund discipline.

Keywords: sociology of education; New Zealand; realist sociology; cultural politics; policy analysis; indigenous theory

1. Introduction

In 1972, Rupert Goodman’s prediction for the sociology of education in New Zealand saw the field ‘growing into an accepted discipline with its own concepts and methodology’ (125). This was not an optimism shared by Richard Bates (1979) at the end of that decade. Arguing that ‘[s]ociological research in New Zealand is virtually non-existent’, Bates declared that ‘New Zealand can hardly claim to have merged into the era of the traditional let alone come to grips with the new sociology of education’ (17). The following year he cautioned about the consequences of ‘an underdeveloped tradition with a scattered community of scholars’, ‘a lack of conferences, professional publications’ and ‘a dearth of research and analysis and theoretical debate’ (1). A decade later, however, Sue Middleton’s (1989) ‘New Zealand sociology of education’, an account of her research into American influences on the sociology of New Zealand education since 1950, returned to the earlier more opti-
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mistic view of the discipline’s development. Middleton provided an important overview of the state of the discipline, referring to conferences, journals, professional activities and informal collegial networks, to the expansion of the teaching of sociology of education in university departments of education and to the ‘new sociology of education’s radical theories and methodologies’.

The new Marxist sociology of education was about the transformation of society. It was also the result of society’s transformation. The discipline’s radicalisation resulted from its historical location within, and contribution to, the ‘unprecedented commitment by successive governments to supporting a national, university-based intellectual class in both the sciences and the humanities – something that had never happened before’ (Cannadine 2008, 24). Roger Dale (2001, 8) uses the term ‘redemptive’ to describe the emancipatory political goal of the new sociology of education, a term that captures the moral imperative of the new intellectual class’s project in the two post-war decades. According to Michael Young (1998) that goal had two foci, firstly, ‘a contextual focus on classroom practice … which saw teachers as the main agents of educational transformation, and a societal focus as in the Marxist analyses of Bowles and Gintis (1976) and others which emphasized the priority of class struggles in the wider society’ (175).

Initially, Marxist theory had been the discipline’s strength and source of its attraction to a new generation of sociologists of education. However, the discipline’s politicisation was also its nemesis. Michael Young (1998), in describing the new sociology of education in the United Kingdom also captures the New Zealand situation. He identifies two major theoretical weaknesses leading to the discipline’s decline during the 1980s. One weakness was the over-emphasis ‘on the emancipatory role of teachers’. (For example see Lilia Bartolome’s [2007] ‘Radicalizing prospective teachers’ in a recent collection of critical sociology of education edited by McLaren and Kincheloe [2007].) The second ‘major weakness’ was ‘its concentration on the contradictions of capitalism and the assumptions that would lead to its collapse; this led Marxists to neglect how capitalism was changing and how these changes were transforming the terms of educational policy debates and struggles’ (Young 1998, 175). One change in particular is the way in which the shift from class to identity politics contributed to the creation of localised versions of neoliberalism that characterise late capitalism (Rata 2000, 2010).

Underlying those weaknesses is one that is more pervasive in its effects on the sociology of education in New Zealand as elsewhere. I think Roger Dale (2001) identified it correctly when he referred to the ‘unproblematic and rarely questioned goal’ (8) behind the discipline’s project of social emancipation. The goals of social justice and emancipation drive the political approach in the discipline, one which ranges from the strident, for example, ‘critical teachers must develop sophisticated ways to address imperialist conquests’ (Kincheloe 2008, 40), to an earlier, more restrained plea, from Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren (1989), for a public education ‘which aims at developing critical
citizens and reconstructing community life by extending the principles of social justice to all spheres of economic, cultural and political life’ (xxii). But Kenneth Minogue (1998) reminds us of Thomas Hobbes’ warning against ‘moral dogmatism focused on the term “justice”’ (5). The ‘conception of social justice that is the dominant moral criterion of our time’ (6) is not unproblematic and should be questioned. ‘Politics has ever been the arena of moral ambiguity’, one in which good intentions may lead to unintended outcomes. ‘Fiat justicia, ruat coelum, let justice prevail, though the heavens fall’ (7). I provide an example of such unintended outcomes from good intentions in the discussion of indigenous kaupapa Maori education in the next section. My analysis suggests that Kincheloe’s (2007, 2008) desire to regard indigenous politics as social justice per se ignores the complexities involved in the strategic use of indigeneity as both an instrument of possession and dispossession (Li 2010).

Young (1998) has argued that the extent of the discipline’s politicisation meant that it ‘failed to develop the concept of future possibilities that might have been the intellectual basis for genuine educational transformation’ instead succumbing to ‘increasingly inward looking theoretical approaches’ (174). One of these inward looking approaches is theorising cultural revivalism as an anti-modern, anti-Western project (despite the very modern social justice ideals attributed to its politics). Yet ‘tradition, primitivism, modernism and postmodernism are all constituent ideologies of the modern’ (Friedman 2006, xiv). These very ‘Western anti-Westernisms’ (xvi) are as easily tuned to the ‘reactionary modernism’ of fascism (Herf 1984), as to the post-modern revolt of the civilised against civilisation, a revolt in the tradition of the Greek Cynics (Lovejoy and Boas 1935) or to various forms of religious and ethnic fundamentalisms at the extreme end of cultural politics.

According to Friedman (2006) progressive class politics ‘finds its source within the imaginary trajectory’ of the modern nation-state. The integration of formerly separate populations into that new socio-political entity led to a ‘developmental cosmology’, one in which action was channelled to ‘a politics of social transformation’ (xvi). The regression to cultural politics in recent decades is the result of the ‘modernism’s declining hegemony’, of its fragmentation into a new imaginary, that of pre-modern socio-political units. ‘Romanticism, traditionalism and anti-modernism’ are the ‘new forms of integration between the individual and the smaller entity’ (xvi). In contrast Michael Apple (2003) considers that differentiating between the ‘social Left’ and the ‘cultural Left’ in this way is a ‘false antithesis’ (224). With reference to Nancy Fraser’s concerns about the way ‘justice is imagined’ (as cited in Apple 2003, 224), Apple sees the shift from the redistribution of social politics to the recognition of cultural politics as progressive politics. Both Friedman and Apple regard cultural politics as a modern project. However, for Friedman, such politics is a reaction against progressivism – an ideology of regression – while for Apple and other politicised educational sociologists, such as McLaren and Kincheloe (2007), cultural politics is progressive.
Anthropologists, such as Jonathan Friedman (1994, 2006), Adam Kuper (1999), Roger Sandall (2001) and Peter Sutton (2009), have theorised cultural politics within the larger processes of the global economy and the ideologies of late capitalism. The sociology of education could contribute to that theoretical work by exploring the relationship between localised politics and global neoliberalism in terms of the effect on education. Release from the moral position that ties the discipline to seeing all cultural political movements as progressive would enable a more critical analysis of the complexities of local initiatives, including the ways in which cultural identity movements may assist in localising neoliberalism. For example, cultural projects in education, such as kaupapa Māori education in New Zealand that I discuss in the next section, may contribute to creating non-nation-state entities (i.e. corporate or neotribes, Rata 2000) by providing seemingly progressive justification for the devolution and privatisation of public education. Such entities provide alternative identities and a new form of oppositional, non-class, politics that are attractive to marginalised workers and vulnerable middle-class intellectuals.

The external forces of neoliberalism more widely, and the shift to a skills-oriented approach in education more specifically, also conspired against the discipline. The outcome, according to Young (1998), was the ‘collapse into forms of political pessimism, cultural oppositionism and relativism (depending on the different intellectual roots of the theory) while some become involved in school effectiveness studies or become trapped in a theoretical pessimism which … leads to giving up sociology of education altogether’ (174). Young did, however, acknowledge the continuation of a critical strand in policy theorisation and analysis, an approach he distinguished from the growing tendency towards policy evaluation.

In this article I examine how the discipline in New Zealand has experienced the period of decline. My focus is confined to two of the areas identified by Michael Young that are most relevant to New Zealand sociology of education. I argue that the first, ‘cultural oppositionism’, based on New Zealand’s official acceptance of biculturalism,1 is a major weakness, one that continues to contribute to the discipline’s fragmentation. The second area of analysis concerns the development of critical policy research during the 1990s. In New Zealand, as in the United Kingdom, the critical strand of the sociology of education continues in the area of policy analysis. Given the discipline’s ‘preoccupation with value questions, particularly those around educational and social inequality’ (Gerwitz and Cribb 2009, ix), the issue of its politicisation remains central to the discipline’s self-reflexivity. Indeed, Gerwirtz and Cribb refer to the ‘debate about the proper level of engagement of sociologists with value judgements and policy recommendations’ … ‘as a central problematic for the field’ (viii).

Is the discipline a sociology of education or a sociology for education – a controversial question in debates about the politicisation of the discipline in the 1980s (Young 1998) and one that remains central in the shift to policy
critique. As a sociology of education, the discipline is still intensely focused on power relations, which suggests a possibility for renewal. McDonough and Nuriez (2007) draw our attention to the ongoing usefulness of Bourdieu’s ‘preoccupation with three problematics at the heart of a critical sociology of education, namely: resolving the structure/agency dichotomy, advancing the practice of reflexive social science and demonstrating the necessity of always linking theory and empirical research’ (142). In contrast, a sociology for education promotes the researcher’s own politics, progressive as they may be, but weakened by the ambiguities of the underpinning moral imperative. That question of a sociology of or for education frames my analysis both of the critique of politicised Māori research in the next section and of policy analysis in section four.

2. ‘Cultural oppositionism’ in sociology of education

Emerging from within the new sociology of education within the wider context of, firstly, Māori cultural revivalism, then, in the mid-1980s, from political retiralisation, Māori educational sociologists such as Linda Smith (1999), Graham Smith (1997), Mason Durie (2001) and Russell Bishop (2000) developed a sociology for Māori education research known variously as kaupapa Māori (the term I will use in this article), mātāuranga Māori, tikanga Māori, post-colonial studies and indigenous studies. It is acknowledged as a site of critical resistance in the discipline; for example, Kincheloe (2008) refers to ‘the genius of Maori research (that) intersects with the critical bricolage help(ing) us understand the value of multilogical notions of knowledge production’ (146). Kaupapa Māori has also influenced educational policy outside New Zealand. Early childhood language nests (kohanga reo) are one of New Zealand’s indigenous education institutions based on kaupapa Māori principles. Thomas Berger (2006) in his Report on the Nunavut Project, recommending that ‘a strong program of bilingual education must be adopted’ (iv) for the Inuit of the Nunavut territory, proposed a model based on New Zealand Māori language nests. He refers to their rapid proliferation. ‘In 1992 there was only one, by 1998 there were 646’ (33). But the actual picture shows the opposite. It is true that the kohanga proliferated in the 1990s but since that time there has been a rapid decline. The first kohanga reo (language nest) was established in 1982 (not 1992 as Berger states). Numbers fell from a peak of 767 kohanga in 1996, to 501 in 2005. Since then, there has been a 7.4 percent decline to 464 kohanga in 2009 (Ministry of Education 2009).

Despite the claims made in support of kaupapa Māori education and its international influence in theory and policy, its place in the wider Māori retiralisation movement poses a number of problems for the sociology of education. In this section I discuss three of these problems: firstly, reifying the concepts of ‘race/ethnicity’ to justify a binary division between two essentialised social groups, Māori and non-Māori; secondly, institutionalising controls on the
‘who’, ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ of Māori education research; thirdly, aligning Māori education research to the political interests of retribalisation (Smith 1999; Durie 2003). According to Durie (2001) the goals of academic work and the development of Māori educational policy is to advance the ‘Māori call for tino rangatiratanga [tribal sovereignty]’ (1).

The ethnic binary that underpins kaupapa Māori sociology of education ‘uses a misconceived because far too holistic notion of culture’ (Lukes 2003, 34). It ignores the fact that ‘cultures are always open systems, sites of contestation and heterogeneity, of hybridisation and cross-fertilization, whose boundaries are inevitably indeterminate’ (34). In contrast, kaupapa Māori theory is based on the concept of permanently separate ethnic groups, created in a primordial and, hence, unchangeable past that ties biological descent to socio-cultural existence. According to Sidney Mead (1997), a leading Māori academic and tribal leader, ‘[i]f you are born a Māori, then you accept the consequences of that biological fact, and the culture that comes with it’ (8).

The ‘beguiling binary built around the notions of collective categories eternally in conflict’ (Cannadine 2008, 34) characterises the indigenous approach in New Zealand sociology of education. The extent of the racial ideology’s beguiling attraction is demonstrated by Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins’ (2008) ‘working the colonizer-indigene hyphen’ (473). This is an argument for the maintenance of a permanent tension in an ahistorical present between two groups regarded as separate on the basis of different ethnic heritages and, ironically, different historical colonial experiences. According to Jones and Jenkins, ‘in indigene-colonizer research and teaching, the hyphen is to be protected and asserted and is a positive site of productive methodological work’ (475). However, there are social scientists and historians, as well as educational sociologists, who are critical of the moral imperative driving kaupapa Māori sociology. Such research, based upon an ahistorical understanding of social reality, becomes what the New Zealand historian W.H. Oliver (2001) calls ‘presentism’. With reference to Māori research in particular, Oliver, criticises the ‘instrumental presentism’, the using of ‘facts for present purposes’ (21) of the historical research and writing used ‘to write New Zealand history “from a Māori point of view”’ (10). Kerry Howe (2009) discusses the ‘moral positioning’ rather than ‘open or undirected historical investigation’ (20) that has produced a ‘dark age’ for serious scholarship in Māori history (22).

The Māori non-Māori binary is contextualised within an indigenous-Western dichotomy. Joe Kincheloe (2008) regards this approach as enabling ‘critical pedagogies [to] operate in the multilogical zone of interaction – more and more aware of the poverty of Western monological ways of seeing and their disastrous historical and contemporary effects’ (147). Yet this approach, one common to kaupapa Māori, ignores the very Western character of anti-Westernism to which I referred earlier. It also reduces modern science to just another form of ‘Western’ cultural knowledge, a position promoted by L.T.
Smith (1999), in her influential Decolonizing methodologies and strongly criticised by Peter Munz (1999), John Clark (2006) and Dannette Marie and Brian Haig (2006, 2009). In addition, the Western non-Western bifurcation leads to the reification of ‘indigenous’ as the concept of an essentialised group. (For critical analyses of indigeneity see, for example: Rata 2002; Waldron 2002; Schroder 2003; Widdowsen and Howard 2008; Sutton 2009; Li 2010). Using a political economy paradigm, Li conceptualises indigeneity as ‘communal fixing’, that is, as the ideological and practical management of people to land in response to capitalism’s constantly changing requirements.

The ethnicised binary underpinning indigenous sociology of education is used to justify the idea that ‘kaupapa Māori research is research by Māori, for Māori and with Māori … it comes from tangata whenua, hapu and iwi [tangata whenua – people of the land; hapu – sub-tribe; iwi – tribe]’ (Smith 1994, 1–2). Policies and practices now exist in New Zealand universities to institutionalise this position, particularly to control the involvement of people who are not of Māori descent. If non-Māori are involved in the research, its purpose and methods are controlled by Māori. According to Cram (1997) ‘Māori themselves should be involved in the design, delivery, management and monitoring of the research process’ (46). An example of the extent of the control comes from the 2009 University of Auckland human participants ethics application and manual (University of Auckland 2009). The authorisation of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Māori) or his nominee is now required if an applicant wishes to conduct research that will ‘have impact on Māori persons as Māori’ or into a ‘topic of particular interest to Māori’ (Application Form: University of Auckland 2009, 12). The applicant must ‘(e)xplain how the intended research process is consistent with the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi’ (University of Auckland 2009, 12). In addition a Māori researcher is required to ‘list his or her tribal affiliations. If the researcher is non-Māori, he or she should state his or her background’ (University of Auckland 2009, 11). In this way a researcher’s racial heritage becomes a criterion for undertaking research.

The political imperative behind kaupapa Māori research promotes the idea of a peoples’ struggle against a hegemonic state (for example, see Kincheloe 2008). Yet, as early as 1989 McCulloch argued that there was actually ‘little evidence of this resistance and struggle’ (50) in New Zealand education. However, according to Graham Smith (1997) ‘kaupapa Māori strategies involve a complex arrangement of conscientisation, resistance and transformative praxis, which collectively seek to transform these twin crises related to education and culture. Education and schooling are significant and important sites of struggle …’ (27). But a range of evidence suggests that kaupapa Māori schooling is not a site of struggle. Firstly, rather than a ‘flax-roots’ peoples’ struggle, the 1987–1989 campaign to secure legislation for the kaupapa Māori schools was conducted by a small, highly effective, lobby group led by university-educated professionals, including a disproportionate number of academics.
Their networks of influence within the state, amongst politicians and government officials, were the decisive factor in the campaign’s success. 3

Secondly, there is the marked decline in the number of Māori early childhood Māori ‘language nests’, (kohanga reo) from 767 in 1996 to 512 in 2005 (DMAD 2006, 14) that I referred to earlier. This is despite the kohanga being used by Smith (2003) as the prime example of successful resistance. Thirdly, the proportion of Māori students who attend kura kaupapa Māori remains low at 3.8 percent of Māori learners (Education Counts 2006) despite the kura being state funded since 1990. Finally, there are serious concerns about the quality of education provided by the kaupapa Māori schools, especially concerning the students’ English language competency and academic standards (Berryman and Glynn 2004; May and Hill 2004). Despite this, the belief in kaupapa Māori education as a people’s struggle against the hegemonic state is re-stated in a 2008 teacher education text, once again without supporting evidence. ‘Kaupapa Māori theory is a critical theory approach that examines resistance and struggle, and has an emancipatory focus’ (McMurchy-Pilkington and Trinick 2008, 134).

Inherent to the politicised character of kaupapa Māori research is the requirement that research is to be undertaken in the political interests of the research subjects. This is not only a problem for the sociology of education of course. It has long been one of anthropology’s concerns. The anthropologist Alain Babadzan (2000) describes it in terms of social scientists who ‘appropriate the ethnic-culturalist discourse that actors themselves hold about the meaning of their practices’ (149). A consequence of this approach is that it becomes difficult for researchers to distance themselves from the object of their inquiry, that is, to find the Archimedean point (Shore and Wright 1998) outside the system that enables the researcher to establish a critical distance and to engage in reflexive analysis required for critical thinking. I am not saying that the researcher is impartial in doing this, but I am saying that the critical distance does make the research objective. (I draw on Bunge’s [1999, xi] distinction between objectivity as a philosophical category and impartiality as a moral and political category here.)

Politicised research can also make it difficult to criticise the research, a situation that removes kaupapa Māori from the scientific requirement that all research is subject to scrutiny. A number of writers have discussed the way in which this undermines kaupapa Māori’s claim to be research (for example, see Munz 1999, 2001; Clark 2006; Marie and Haig 2006). Marie and Haig (2009) and Openshaw and Rata (2007) have detailed the ways in which kaupapa Māori ‘methodologists employ a number of tactics such as making appeals to authority and special pleading to insist that their doctrines are beyond critical scrutiny’ (Marie and Haig 2009, 132). A consequence of the ring-fencing of Māori education research is that researchers who do undertake Māori educational research outside the kaupapa Māori paradigm are erroneously perceived as hostile to social justice ideals.
Politicised theory, such as Marxist new sociology of education of the 1970s and kaupapa Māori theory in the twenty-first century leads to a sociology for education that is in danger of misrepresenting social reality and, in so doing, becoming the ideology for its own political interests. This is an irony not lost on those Marxists sociologists of the 1970s who understood ideology in the Althusserian sense as ‘a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 153). While both critical sociologies (of and for) employ reason to critique ‘reason’, giving a central place to understanding the role of ideology in ‘molding consciousness’ (Torres 2006, 58), a sociology for education is restricted by its Althusserian structural determinism. In contrast a sociology of education benefits from its more empirically grounded study of real human agency.

New Zealand sociologists of education who addressed the issues of ‘politicised’ critical theory and the place of empirical research included Roy Nash. For Nash, the solution was to continue with the rigorous theoretical analysis that characterised the neo-Marxist 1970s but to also work with empirical studies. He warned that otherwise ‘history and sociology are condemned to the role of propaganda’ (Nash 1988, 155). Similarly, Roger Openshaw (with Greg Lee and Howard Lee) (1993) in Challenging the myths, cautions against ‘utilising history solely as a footnote to theory’ arguing instead that theory ‘has an important place in education history, but only if it is seen as a tool of analysis to be utilised selectively and employed interactively with the available data’ (130). Geoff Whitty (2006) describes the change in the United Kingdom to a more empirically grounded approach in comparison with the USA, perhaps one of the reasons why American critical sociologists of education, such as Michael Apple, Peter McLaren and Joe Kincheloe, dominate the ranks of sociologists for education.

The widening gulf between politicised kaupapa Māori sociology of education and a critical enquiry approach based on a social reality external to the researcher and, hence, able to be objectified, is best demonstrated by Roy Nash’s long-term research into Māori education. In the next section I use Nash’s critique of the politicisation of Māori research to illustrate the kaupapa Māori contribution to the fragmentation of New Zealand sociology of education. Although Nash is not the only sociologist critical of the kaupapa Māori approach, his work most usefully demonstrates the criticism of kaupapa Māori education research because it is the most comprehensive covering nearly three decades from the 1980s until his death in 2006.

3. Māori education research

Nash (2001a) insisted that ‘the reason for the sociology of education [is] the real existence of socially differentiated access to education’ (55). He brought to that enquiry a combination of theoretical analysis and empirical findings. Working from his research findings into the practices of school students, and
drawing on Bourdieu’s understanding of the relationship between ‘economic and cultural forms of capital in the transmission of intergenerational privilege’ (2001b, 54), Nash traced student practices to the socialised dispositions that generated the practices and finally to theories of social positions and structural forces within which dispositions and practices are formed. The resulting ‘Family Resource Framework’ became increasingly sophisticated as he developed it in a number of influential publications (Nash 1993; Nash and Harker 1997). Nash (1993) justified his focus on the family as well as on education itself by arguing that it is ‘[f]rom their class position families derive certain material and symbolic resources (financial, cultural/intellectual and social) which their members use with strategic effect in the interests or maintaining, or improving, their social and economic standing in the present – and in succeeding – generations. This has always been a major function in the family but the educational system has acquired a fundamental role in the inter-generationally transmission of social position which is historically recent …’ (2).

Nash (2005) argued that empirical research using a structure-disposition-practice sociological model that enabled greater understanding of the relationships between social class, cognitive socialisation practices in the family, literacy and achievement at school ‘could allow sociological research into inequality/difference to move forward’ (19). This was not a popular position to hold in New Zealand sociology of education, which has, since the late-1980s, tended to avoid class analysis for cultural theory. (Notable exceptions to this include the Freeman-Moir and Scott [2003] edited volume.) However, Nash (2001a) argued that by investigating the dispositions and practices at the individual and family level, the sociologist was not ‘blaming the victim’, but showing the mechanisms by which ‘the unequal structures of capitalism generated unequal social positions, and socialised dispositions generated practices’ (59).

Nash (2001c) used the ‘structure, disposition and practice’ sociological model to explore the reasons for the relatively poor educational attainment of Māori. He hypothesised ‘that Māori students as a whole underachieve in school basically because of the class-resource-based practices of their families’ (35). Rejecting claims that this was ‘deficit theory’, Nash (2001c) argued that ‘bulk of the Māori population is located in the working-class, indeed, into the lower skilled fraction, and as a consequence of that has adopted, through processes of acculturation into specific class cultures, practices with a distinctive character’ (35). ‘There is good evidence, in fact, that literate family resources and practices are not distributed equally by ethnicity within social class categories’. This is classic Bourdieuan sociology. For example, Young (1998) describes how ‘Bourdieu has argued so cogently [that] schools are most successful with those whom they do not have to teach how to learn – such students develop their learning skills and habits elsewhere, usually in the home’ (178).

In a 1983 paper, Nash contextualised cultural theory in terms of the political interests of the Māori elite who were emerging from the cultural politics
of the new middle class (Fitzgerald 1972; Webster 1998; Rata 2000). He described how the dominance of cultural theory to explain differential educational attainments was a feature of the political interests of this elite. Referring to ‘what is now very much the party line’, Nash (1983) explains ‘the silent exclusion of class from the discourse’ (82) in the interests of ‘the programme of ethnic compensation on which the entire political strategy is based’ (82). With this insight, Nash accurately anticipated the Māori elite’s strategy of compensation which became the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process from 1985 (Sharp 2002; Rata 2003, 2005). His (1983) suggestion for future research into ‘the nature of the elite group [of Māori], its relationship with the working class Māori community, its level of integration with the state apparatus, and the connection between its educational and other social policies’ (84) was forestalled by the success of culture politics since that time and the difficulties encountered by those who wish to take up Nash’s suggestions for critical research. (For example, the barriers imposed by kaupapa Māori research requirements in the University of Auckland ethics manual referred to above).

Roy Nash (2006) acknowledged the centrality of class relations of production in understanding how differential power affected education but encountered the difficulties of maintaining a class analysis in New Zealand sociology of education at a time when the ‘politics of ethnicity is apt to get in the way of legitimate research’ (157). Accusations of ‘cultural insensitivity’ and ‘even racism’ ‘have served to discourage those interested in researching the question fundamental to educational sociology, namely: What are the causes of mean differences in the educational achievements of social groups within a given society?’ (156). Despite being the target of such accusations, Nash continued to deepen his theoretical analysis taking it into the academically and politically difficult areas of cognitive socialisation while drawing on sound empirical material. He (2001c) identified ‘two principal mechanisms’ that ‘drive the underachievement of working-class students as a class’ (32). The most important is the ‘distribution, as a result of class variations in early childhood socialisation practices, of those specialised forms of cognitive functioning demanded by the education system’ (32). ‘The second major cause of poor educational attainment is the existence of a loosely related cluster of practices adopted, predominantly by working-class students, from a repertoire within their class and ethnic communities’ (32).

Significantly, Nash’s use of class analysis was not an ideological attachment to neo-Marxist theory’s political goals but a willingness to employ the most useful explanatory tool to make sense of his research findings. Of course, Nash’s commitment to empirical research is in the Marxist tradition as much as is his theoretical analysis. It was Marx, after all, who emphasised the material base of ideas:

We do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceived, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh.
Set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real-life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimes of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. (Marx and Engels 1970, 47)

In one of his final publications, Nash (2006) summed up his ‘realist sociology’. ‘The task for social scientists is to investigate the nature of society and to construct explanatory narratives that describe the mechanisms through which it is maintained and through which it is open to transformation’ (169). In this, he maintained his efforts to counter the weaknesses of politicised sociology of education, weaknesses that he considered a pervasive feature of kaupapa Māori research.

4. Critical policy analysis in the sociology of education

In this section I turn to the sociology of education’s renewed ‘critical dialogue with government policy, especially that concerned with marketisation’ (Young 1998, 174). It is an area that seeks to maintain the critical approach of the sociology of education in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. According to Young, critical policy should be regarded as the discipline’s strength, one that addresses the weakness of Marxist sociology of education by reversing the concentration on theory that ‘led Marxists to neglect how capitalism was changing and how these changes were transforming the terms of policy debates and struggles’ (175). (Critical policy analysis is to be distinguished from ‘those with a more pragmatic involvement in various kinds of policy analysis and evaluation’ (169). That is also a feature of New Zealand research, particularly as a result of government research contracts that are now a significant part of university education departments funding sources.)

The increasing shift to critical policy analysis occurred within the context of changes to the politics of global capitalism, particularly after 1989. Marxist analysis changed from a rejection of capitalism to the transformative possibilities within capitalism. For example, Fischer et al. (1996) emphasise the idea that inequalities are caused not only by the exploitative capitalist economic system but also by ‘purposeful, and alterable, policy’ (10). Because education’s role is in ‘constructing the right sort of egalitarian social relationships so that people have equal standing in public life’ (Kymlicka 2002, 196), policy is conceptualised as the means for transformation accepting that ‘sufficient social equality is possible by accepting the market-based inequalities in the
economy and looking to other spheres for social justice – for example, education and public recognition’ (198).

While critical policy analysis remains oriented to the democratic ideals of social justice that increasingly informed public education throughout the twentieth century, the focus has shifted from a general analysis of capitalism and the ideological role of the state in ideological reproduction to numerous critiques of neoliberal policies and their effect on public education. The conclusion of many educational sociologists is that New Zealand educational reforms of the post-1987 period, like those in the United Kingdom, were characterised by the ‘pervasiveness and effects of neoliberalism or economic rationalism’ (Olssen 1999, 5). The task of critical theorists lay in ‘exposing the contradictions of New Right policies in education’ (63).

There is a small but growing number of critical educational sociologists who have written, or are currently engaged in writing, about New Zealand’s educational policy, either by developing theoretical approaches, as in the work of John Codd prior to his death in 2006, or providing analyses of the effects of the ‘reforms’ on New Zealand education generally. The critiques have tended to emphasise the privatising effect of imported neoliberal influences on New Zealand educational policy. Roger Openshaw (2009) traces the development of the focus on imported influences to a two-part New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies article that appeared in 1988, to a collection of papers by key education policy researchers in 1990 (Gordon and Codd 1990), then to numerous publications that appeared in the following decade (for example: Codd, Gordon, and Harker 1990; Grace 1990a, 1990b; Middleton, Codd, and Jones 1990; Codd 1995, 1999; Fitzsimmons, Peters, and Roberts 1999; Olssen 1999; Thrupp 1999; Olssen, Codd, and O’Neill 2003).

However, Openshaw (2009) joins Gary McCulloch (1991) and Butterworth and Butterworth (1998) in suggesting that emphasising imported influences tends to overshadow the cumulative impact of indigenous historical factors. Openshaw (2009) argues that, from 1984, ‘radical changes were being advocated across a wide section of society’ with the outcome ‘an educational reform package that reflected an ideologically mixed heritage. Beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the 1980s, neoliberal and Left-liberal pressure for change drew upon a commonly created discourse that not only profoundly influenced social policy at the time but also gave birth to a new blended ideology that continues to shape the way we view the world’ (184). The value of this research for New Zealand sociology of education is that the integration of indigenous and imported influences provides a more complete picture, one that may well contribute to the strengthening the discipline. Empirical accounts of shifts to privatisation and devolution in education, especially in Maori education (see, for example, the proposals in the Maori Tertiary Education Framework designed to devolve education into the control of the corporate tribes [Maori Tertiary Reference Group 2003]) would provide a greater understanding of how the shift from class to cultural politics contributed to neoliberalism.
5. Conclusion

My purpose in this article has been limited to examining the contribution of kaupapa Māori research to the current division of New Zealand sociology of education between a sociology of and a sociology for education. I conclude by mentioning several factors that suggest a possible reinvigoration of the discipline through the ‘reshaping of existing tools’ (Dale 2009, 386). The maintenance of the critical strand in policy analysis is one such factor. A second may actually lay in the division within the discipline between kaupapa Māori researchers and their critics. For this to be the case, however, the division would need to develop into a vigorous intellectual debate based upon the theoretical analysis of empirically established social reality and the removal of restrictions to research by those who do not use a kaupapa Māori approach to research Māori education. If a genuine debate did emerge, it may provide a way to overcome a major problem that characterises politicised sociology for education where ‘normative claims (are made) that present a particular way of defining a problem and its solution, as if these were the only ways possible, while enforcing closure or silence on other ways of thinking or talking’ (Shore and Wright 1997, 3). Such politicisation produced ‘very real controversy about how far and in what ways the making of ethical and political judgements can, and ought to be seen as part of the job of sociology’ (Gewirtz and Cribb 2009, 186).

Openshaw (2009) makes a telling point about the way a politicised approach can limit the sociology of education. In the conclusion to his book about the reform of New Zealand education in the 1980s, he says that ‘the writing of this book has been shaped by my growing conviction as a university teacher and researcher, that many of our perceptions of the reforms have been shaped more by the continuing debate over them, than by hard evidence from the reform period itself or from the decades that preceded it’ (15). This suggests that a politicised approach may obstruct the understanding of ‘the complex interplay of ideologies at the policy-making level’ (15) by re-shaping the object of enquiry to the goals of the research. Yet, critical policy analysis, based on the commitment to democratic ideals of public education that continues to define sociology of education, cannot avoid the ongoing ‘tension between knowledge based on disciplinary expertise and knowledge based on political priorities’ (Young 2008, 118). However, a response to this dilemma that avoids falling into the ideological trap may lay with Bourdieu’s (1975) reminder (as cited in Young 2008) that ‘seeing intellectual fields as sites of power struggles is not incompatible with having a commitment to truth and objective knowledge’ (118).

It may be too early to regard the growth of critical policy analysis and disputes in Māori education research as trends favouring Rupert Goodman’s optimism rather than Richard Bates’ pessimism – the two opposing predictions with which I began this paper. Indeed, the future of New Zealand sociology of education may be characterised by researchers from a range of disciplines practising the sociology of education, rather than a specific discipline of that
name. An example of this possible future is provided by the inter-disciplinary team researching the anthropology of higher educational policy under the leadership of anthropology professor Cris Shore at the University of Auckland. The team includes members from sociology, education, political studies and geography and pursues an international research project in conjunction with educational sociologists from the University of Bristol and educational anthropologists of policy from Aarhus University in Denmark. However, investigating the future practice of the discipline will require, to paraphrase Sue Middleton (1989), ‘a[n] ongoing sociology of the sociology of education’ (51).

Notes
1. Biculturalism is variously understood as a cultural relationship between Maori and pakeha (settler-descendants of British origin), or between Maori and non-Maori, or as a political relationship between the government and the tribes mandated by the contemporary interpretation of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi (Oliver 2001; Sharp 2002; Rata 2003, 2003, 2005).
2. New Zealand emphasises the idea of the social construction of ethnicity. For example, Statistics New Zealand (2005) defines ‘ethnicity [as] the ethnic groups or groups that people identify with or feel they belong to’ (1). The use of ‘ethnicity’ to replace ‘race’ was an attempt in the post-1960s period to reject racism by rejecting the biological or genetic component attributed to race and to understand descent-group identity in terms of socially constructed values, beliefs and practices alone. Terms such as ‘cultural affiliation’, ‘tribal affiliation’, ‘tribal identity’ and cultural identity’ are used to strengthen this social construction idea. However, socially constructed ethnicity still contain a genetic or biological component. Yinger (1985) regards ‘ethnicity’ as meaningless if it excludes the notion of group belonging that has a genetic or biological base. The concept of a group’s shared genetic heritage does not, of course, mean that ‘human races’ constitute distinct human populations. The low level of genetic variability and of structuring of the human species is incompatible with the existence of race as a biological entity (Pena 2005). But ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ still have conceptual validity as referents for a group’s shared genetic heritage – one that changes constantly as groups migrate and inter-marry. Ironically the social construct concept actually works against its anti-racial intention by maintaining a distinction between social groups that is located in a shared genetic heritage understood in primordial terms as unchanging.
3. I was secretary, then coordinator, of Te Runanga o Nga Kura Kaupapa Maori o Tamaki Makaurau, the main lobby group, from 1987 to 1991, the years of the campaign. The Runanga’s activities and strategies are documented in my masters and doctoral dissertations (Rata 1991 , 1996).

Notes on contributor
Elizabeth Rata is Associate Professor in the School of Critical Studies in Education at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. A sociologist of education, her research interests include the political economy of new social movements, particularly the effects of global economic change on ethnicity, socio-economic class and cultural politics in New Zealand. She is a member of a research group undertaking an
international comparative study into higher education under the auspices of the European Union’s International Research Scholars Exchange Scheme.

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