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Stories from the margins: Rangatahi kāpo narratives of state failure

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Despite a raft of conventions, declarations, legislation and policies protecting marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, indigenous people and children in New Zealand from discrimination and their rights to equal access to the goods of society (including education and health), the lived realities of rangatahi Māori (indigenous young people of New Zealand) who are kāpo (blind or vision impaired) tells a different story. This paper presents some of the preliminary findings of the research project 'Growing up kāpo Māori', a two year Health Research Council funded project in New Zealand. Specifically this paper, through the narratives of rangatahi kāpo and their whānau (family), critically analyses the effectiveness of rights based documents and New Zealand legislation to protect their rights. It is argued that the state fails rangatahi kāpo in two significant and mutually reinforcing ways, on the one hand it fails to protect them from discrimination and on the other it fails to provide them with a culturally relevant and inclusive education in which to realize their full potential. The paper concludes by drawing on a Māori reading of the Treaty of Waitangi to re-imagine new ways forward in which rangatahi kāpo and their whānau are able to fulfil their twin aspirations to be successful as Māori and be self-determining.

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