

# Exploring New Zealand culture

The purpose of this activity is for participants to discuss the idea of a 'New Zealand culture' and to explore the consequences of assimilation.

## Activity 22

**Time:** 45 minutes – 1 hour.

**Materials:** Copies of the handouts *New Zealand culture iceberg*, page 93; the overhead transparency / slide *Assimilation*, page 94; the handout *New Zealand culture and assimilation*, page 95; and pens and blue tack.

1. Ask the whole group, do they think we have a 'New Zealand culture'?
2. Break into small groups. Give each group a copy of the handout *New Zealand culture iceberg*. Ask them to write on the iceberg what they see as New Zealand culture.
3. Display the sheets of paper on the wall. Allow participants time to walk around the room and look at other groups' work and ask the participants to identify aspects of Māori and introduced British culture. Which of the two cultures is the more obvious today?
4. In the whole group, discuss what 'assimilation' means. Give ESOL participants time to translate and discuss the meaning in their own language(s).
5. Put up the *Assimilation* slide. Explain to the group that this is the way many Māori, and migrants, have explained the pressures to assimilate into the dominant Pākehā culture.
6. Hand out the questions on page 95 for participants to discuss in small groups.

## Notes

**Assimilation** is the process whereby one group forces other groups to adopt its culture.

As early as 1844, the British felt that assimilating Māori into their culture was the best way to ensure that Māori did not experience the same 'disasters' that had occurred as a result of colonisation elsewhere.

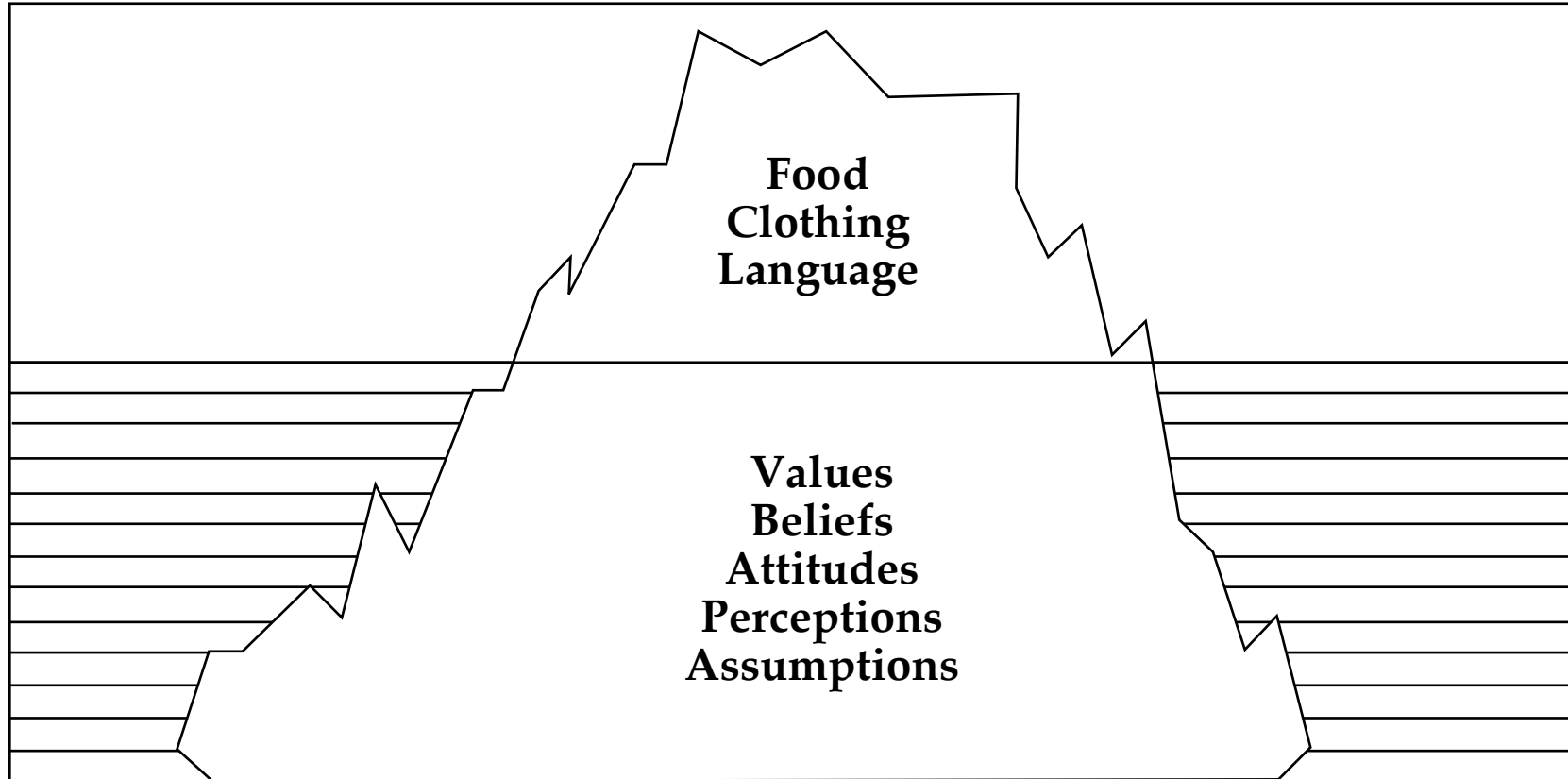
This policy promoted Pākehā culture as superior while at the same time it attempted to separate Māori from their own values and practices. Assimilation of Māori into Pākehā culture continued to be the policy in education for Māori until the 1960s when 'integration' was proposed as an alternative (Herzog, 1996).

Policies of assimilation have been applied to migrants as well. They were expected to fit into the host country and blend in rather than the host country changing in any way. This began to change in the 1960s as some countries (for example, Canada and Australia) began to embrace multiculturalism, an approach which recognised that people had the right to hold on to their own cultures and not be disadvantaged in their access to society and services (Fletcher, 1999). More recently settlement has come to be seen as more of a two-way process whereby changes are required by both migrants and the host society.

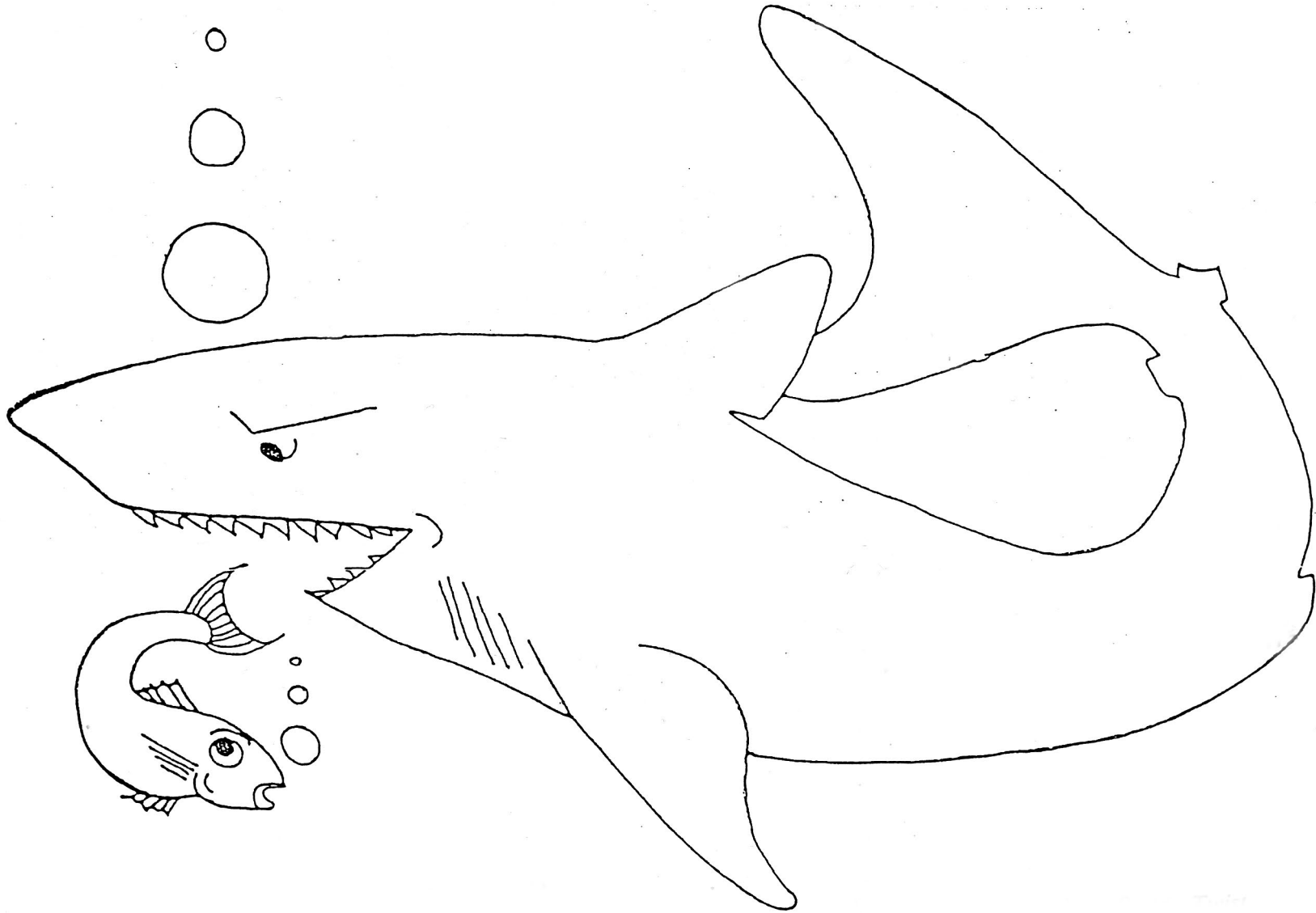
Assimilation remains a contentious issue in Aotearoa / New Zealand. Even though it is no longer the official government policy for Māori or migrants, there are many factors pushing minority groups to become like the dominant group. Some examples of this are formal and informal rules, social pressure to conform, social practices, and discrimination in employment and in accessing resources, as well as prejudice and racism from members of the dominant group.

**Integration** is similar to assimilation, in that two or more different groups merge to become one group. The main difference is that with assimilation all groups become like the dominant group; with integration, the intention is that aspects of each of the different groups are retained. In practice the effect is often similar to assimilation.

# New Zealand culture iceberg



# Assimilation

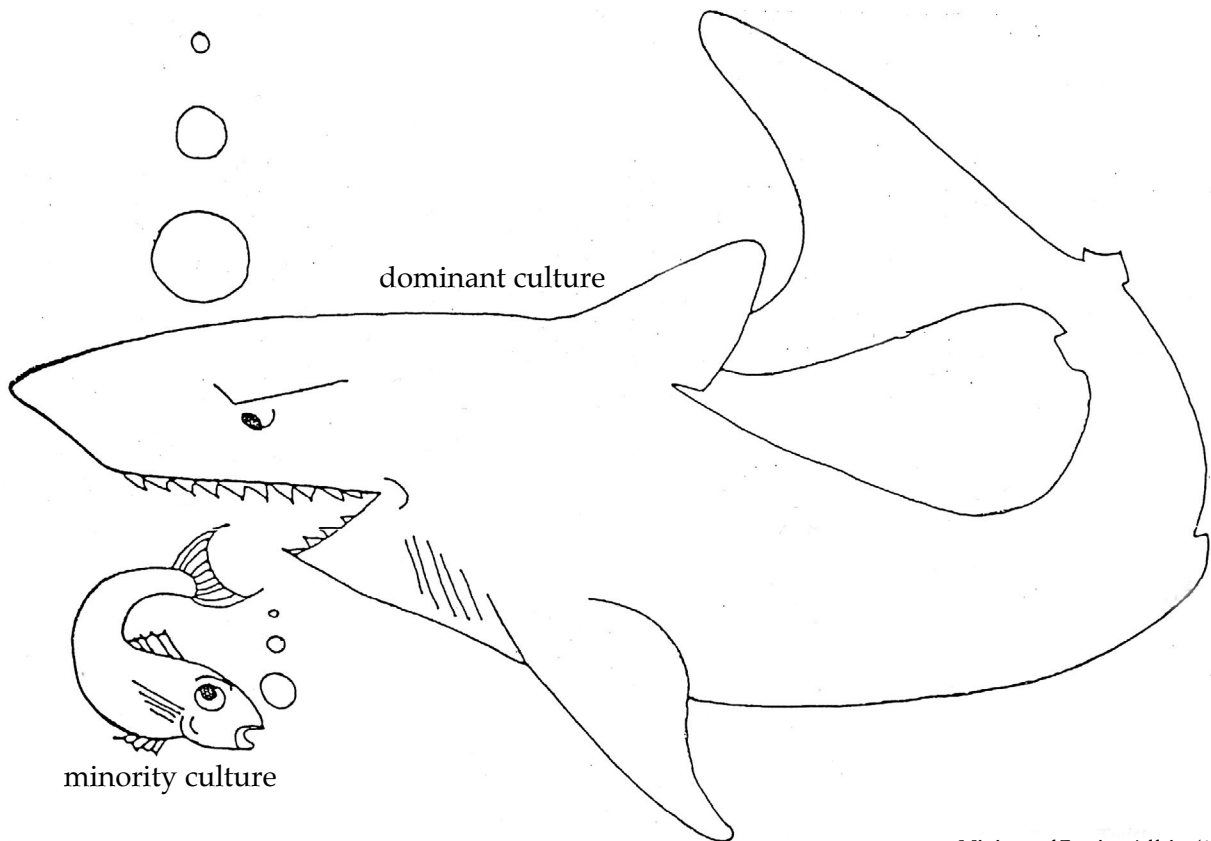


Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1987)

# New Zealand culture and assimilation

## Discussion questions:

1. Do you think there is one culture in New Zealand that we all share? Why/Why not?
2. Do you think that one culture 'eats up' all the other cultures? Why/why not?
3. Which culture do you feel you know more about, Māori culture or Pākehā culture? Why?
4. In what ways did the government try to assimilate Māori into British culture in the past?
5. In what ways does the dominant culture expect migrants to fit in?
6. What do you think this country would be like if all our cultures had a strong place?



Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1987)