

Māori Language Revitalization: A Vision for the Future

Deslie McClutchie Mita

Waiariki Institute of Technology, Rotorua

The Te Kohanga Reo (Language Nests) programs, initiated in Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1982, are perhaps the best known international example of Indigenous early childhood language and culture revitalization efforts. From an academic perspective, the author explores the philosophical principles and foundations of the Te Kohanga Reo movement as well as the challenges and successes of one such program based in Rotorua.

Tihei Mauri ora!

Ki te whaiao, Ki te ao marama

Hui e! Taiki e!

Tena ra koutou nga kanohi ora o nga matua-tipuna kua wheturangitia, tena koutou, tena ra koutou katoa.

Kei te mihi atu ki nga mana, ki nga ihi, ki nga wehi; te mauri e pupuri nei te mana o te Whare Wananga o Wikitoria, Kānata. Kei te mihi atu ki te mana o tena, o tena o tatou, ki te Komiti Whakahaere mo tenei tumomo mahi, tena koutou katoa.

I greet you one and all. We acknowledge our past and those that have gone before us, and those who hold the life force of the University of Victoria, Canada. I also acknowledge the working committee and others who participated within this composition.

This journey is a personal one that captures the passage of the past, present, and future of te Reo Māori, tikanga Māori, and two total Māori immersion early childhood education centres, Kuirau Kohanga Reo and Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau. I begin with who I am, what I am, and where I come from, and I end with my conviction as a tangata whenua (Native) of Aotearoa that the future is in our own hands.

Ko Hikurangi te maunga

Ko Waiapu te awa

Ko Ngati Porou te iwi

Kei konei au

He uri na Porourangi

Hikurangi is my mountain

Waiapu is my river

Ngati Porou is my people

I am here

A descendant of Porourangi

My whakapapa, my genealogy, links to Maui, the demi-god of Māori mythology, to Paikea, the god who arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand on the back of a whale many years ago, to our waka, to our ancestors, to our eponymous ancestor Porourangi and his descendants. I trace my ancestry back to Maui, who fished up Aotearoa/New Zealand from the depths of the sea. His canoe rests in a petrified state on top of our famous mountain Hikurangi, the first place in the world to see the rays of the sun. Paikea, my

famous ancestor and his whale, is now an island at Whangara on the East Coast, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

I am blessed and humbled to have learned from the teachings of yesterday and the enchantment of dreams today, to have aspirations for tomorrow, and to be a descendant of such unique Indigenous people.

*Ehara taku toa i te toa taki tahi
Engari taki mano
Mai nga tipuna*

I come not only with my own strength,
But the strength of my ancestors.

Our world has changed.

I feel it in the water.
I feel it in the earth.
I feel it from history.
Some things should not be forgotten.
History becomes legend.
Legend becomes myth.
Our world has changed.
I feel it from the present.
I feel it for the future.

We need to empower ourselves, to empower future generations,
to reassert and retain Indigenous self-determination.

*The History of the Māori Language
He Tātai Kōrero mō te Reo Māori*

For Māori as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa, te Reo Māori was the language used in all aspects of social, commercial, and political life throughout the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century. Through these years Māori lived in rural settlements. Te Reo Māori was used almost exclusively in Māori homes, marae (sacred meeting places), and other community settings. (A glossary of terms is provided in the Appendix.)

The education of Māori children in the English language was one of the principal aims of an assimilatory educational policy and was rigorously enforced. For many Māori children this was through physical punishment. Sir James Henare, a highly respected kaumatua (Elder) who attended school in the first quarter of the 20th century, gave evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal in 1985 of his experiences of being sent to the bush to cut down a piece of supplejack with which he was physically punished for breaking the rule that te Reo Māori must "be left at the school gates" (Waikerepuru and Nga Kaiwhakapumau i te Reo Incorporated Society, 1986, p. 13).

By the 1930s English acquisition skills were seen by many Māori as the key to a better education, lifestyle, wealth, and social status. This widespread perception created a language shift from te Reo Māori to English from the 1940s to the 1970s. The government's urbanization policy

was one of “pepperpotting” Māori into Pakeha (white) suburbs to hasten integration and to fragment Māori as a tribal people. The policy sought to establish government control and to phase out Māori as humanely as possible (Fleras & Spoonley, 1999). Throughout this period English remained the exclusive language of education and government services. Māori adults stopped speaking te Reo Māori to their children.

By 1970 te Reo Māori played only a marginal role in Māori children’s lives. Māori kuia and koroua (elderly women, elderly men) used te Reo Māori primarily on the marae and in community and religious activities. It was predicted that once the generation of Māori adults had passed on, “Māori would be a language without native speakers” (Ministry of Māori Development, 2003).

*A Vision for the Future of the Māori Language:
He Tirohanga ki te Huarahi Whakamua mō te Reo Māori*

Toku reo, toku ohooho

Toku reo, toku mapihi maurea

Toku reo, toku whakakai marihi

This proverb means that the Māori language is precious and invaluable.

The 1970s and early 1980s can be characterized as an age of protest as Māori rallied to fight for their rights and to raise awareness of the status and plight of the Māori language and culture (Walker, 1990). “Māori have fought for the survival of te Reo Māori, in response to colonization, because it is the life-blood of their culture” (Ka’ai, 2004). In 1985 during his testimony at the Waitangi Tribunal, Sir James Henare quoted Oliver Wendell Holmes (1860): “Language is a solemn thing; it grows out of life, out of its agonies and its ecstasies, its wants and its weariness. Every language is a temple in which the soul of those who speak it is enshrined.” Therefore, Henare exhorted,

The taonga, our Māori language, as far as our people are concerned, is the very soul of the Māori people. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his own soul? What profit to the Māori if we lose our language and lose our soul? Even if we gain the world. To be monolingual, Japanese once said, is to know only one universe. (Henare, 1985, cited in Waikerepuru and Nga Kaiwhakapumau i te Reo Incorporated Society, 1986, pp. 40-41)

Innovative steps were taken to prevent the demise of the Māori language. The Māori population was alerted to teaching te Reo Māori to preschool and school children as a strategy for language survival, and the Kōhanga Reo (language nests) were born.

Kōhanga Reo

In response to Māori concern, the Department of Māori Affairs created Kōhanga Reo in 1982 with the goal of ensuring the survival of the Māori language. The birth of Kōhanga Reo was a significant event in the quest for Māori language revitalization. Since its inception the Kōhanga Reo move-

ment has been hailed as one of the most exciting and powerful national initiatives undertaken by Māori people. It has had an effect on New Zealanders, the government, and indeed the international scene. Its philosophy is derived from Māori Tino Rangatiratanga (Māori supremacy, Māori sovereignty), which authenticates the unique existence of Māori people as the tangata whenua of Aotearoa. Tino Rangatiratanga is fundamental to Māori identity.

The primary objective of Kōhanga Reo is to immerse preschool children in an environment where te Reo Māori is the only language of communication. The first language nest was established in 1982; by 1985 there were over 400. With children graduating from Kōhanga Reo and entering into English-only mainstream schools, parents found that their children lost fluency in their Māori language. Those children needed support; thus the first Kura Kaupapa Māori (immersion primary school) was established in 1985.

Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori pioneered the way for Māori people in Aotearoa/New Zealand to reclaim power and autonomy in terms of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and Tino Rangatiratanga based on Māori knowledge and Māori ways of doing things. This played a critical role over the last two decades to contributing to the ara poutama (stairway) of generational growth and development of the Māori language for the future. According to Ka'ai (2004), Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori are a natural educational progression. Pere (1997) claims, "language is the life line and sustenance of a culture" (p. 9).

Te Kōhanga Reo was formalized as a national charitable trust in 1983. Its aim is to manage the kaupapa (philosophy) of the Kōhanga Reo movement. The Trust is the governing body and has a key role in providing support to Kōhanga Reo language nests. Specifically, the Trust supports mokopuna (grandchildren), whānau (family), and the cultural infrastructure of language, kinship, relationship management, whānau learning, whānau decision-making, and community interdependence. The Trust also supports the education, health, and communication needs of Kōhanga Reo children and whānau (Te Kōhanga Reo, 2003).

At this time it is imperative to discuss the meaning of whānau to give clarity to this dimension. Whānau traditionally is a group of people descended from a common ancestor. Included are spouses and whangai (fosterchildren). As whānau members are linked to several ancestors, it is common to be affiliated to several whānau, hāpu (subtribes), and iwi (tribes). It is almost impossible to maintain and serve reciprocal commitments to all whānau, hāpu, and iwi; therefore, whānau choose the kin relationships on which they wish to nurture and expend energies. However, it is not unusual for some members of the whānau to service and nurture others elsewhere. This is a way of representing whānau and so fulfilling obligations with other whānau, hāpu, and iwi (Nepe, 1991).

*Kuirau Kōhanga Reo**He kakano i ruia mai i Rangiatea**E kore ai e ngaro*

(A seed sown from Rangiatea that will never be lost.)

Kuirau Kōhanga Reo was established in 1983 at the family home of Waaka and Rosalyn Vercoe, whose parental determination saw the purchase of a piece of property right next door, over the fence from the existing venue. Monies to purchase this property were raised with the support of whānau who worked tirelessly on various projects. The property was then rented until the whānau could raise more money to upgrade the house to the minimum requirements of the early childhood regulations. The children and whānau of Kuirau Kōhanga Reo moved into their new premises in 1990, and Waaka Vercoe named the new venue Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau-Kuirau (The Pathway to te Reo Māori).

Kuirau Kōhanga Reo flourished in an environment of excitement and celebration. The success of Kuirau Kōhanga Reo was due to its significant and valuable whānau (extended family) members who created a caring, fun, and secure milieu where children learnt te Reo Māori and tikanga Māori (Māori language and values).

Kuirau Kōhanga Reo Total Māori Immersion Early Childhood Education Centre

By 1998 the whānau of Kuirau Kōhanga Reo had started thinking of a number of options to take advantage of what the bigger world had to offer their children. Whānau members debated various issues from a Kōhanga Reo perspective, which led to interesting discussions and many long evenings. There was a strong movement in favor of an alternative governing system under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

Consultation hui (gatherings/meetings) were held in Wellington over two years with whānau members, extended whānau members, and prominent members of hapū and iwi, extending to the powers of the beehive (New Zealand Parliament). During those two years the kaupapa (foundation) of Kōhanga Reo was discussed at great length. Careful consideration and rationale were required; it was imperative that any decision made should provide equilibrium to maintain the security, well-being, and future of our children and whānau. It was also important to ensure a transparent positive transfer from the umbrella of the National Kōhanga Reo Trust to the umbrella of the Ministry of Education.

The decision made by the Māori people was based on the principle of Tino Rangatiratanga, which involves control of decision-making and self-determination/autonomy. The bold self-empowerment that was strategically planned by Kuirau Kōhanga Reo whānau was a first for any Kōhanga Reo in Rotorua.

Kuirau Kōhanga Reo officially became a charitable trust called Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau, the original name of the house named by Waaka

Vercoe. Kuirau Kōhanga Reo closed and Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau opened as a Total Māori Immersion Early Childhood Education Centre in 2000. In 2003 Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau moved from their current premises and relocated to Whakarewarewa School while a new center was being built with funding support from the Ministry of Education. The new center was designed for the purpose by two whānau members keeping in mind the kaupapa of Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau. In January 2004 Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau opened with a traditional Māori dawn ceremony attended by prominent dignitaries, whānau, hāpu, and iwi.

Today Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau has a staff of six: three kaiako (early childhood educators), of whom two are fully qualified and currently hold their provisional teachers' registration and one is in training; one kairiwhi (reliever); a cook; and an administrator. The current enrollment is 25 children, including five babies under 2 years old and 20 toddlers and young children over 2 years old.

Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau is a designated teacher-led Total Māori Immersion Early Childhood Education Centre and is governed by current whānau members. The kaupapa of Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau encompasses our children's uniqueness and encapsulates our dreams and aspirations for our children's future heritage. It encourages the transformation of kaupapa Māori praxis of cultural values, te Reo Māori, and tikanga Māori. This also validates our belief systems. Our future is in our own hands.

*Ko te reo Māori te iho o te ahurea, ara, ko te mātāuranga
Me ngā āhuatanga katoa o te a o Māori.*

The Māori language is the lifeline of our culture of which knowledge
is the cornerstone for a Māori world view. (Ka'ai, 1995, p. 37)

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Appendix

Nga Whakamarama: Glossary

Aotearoa: Land of the Long White Cloud, New Zealand

Ara: Pathway

Hapū: Subtribe

Hui: Gatherings

Iwi: Tribe

Kaiako: Early childhood teacher

Kairiwhi: Early childhood reliever

Kaumātua: Elder

Kaupapa: Foundation, basic idea

Kōhanga Reo: Language nest

Koroua: Elderly man

Kuia: Elderly woman

Kuiarau/Kuirau: A name of an ancestor, a name of an area in the central business district of Rotorua

Māori: A Pakeha terminology given to the Native people of New Zealand

Māori tino rangatiratang: Māori supremacy, Māori sovereignty

Mokopuna: Grandchild/Grandchildren

Pakeha: A Māori terminology given to white settlers of New Zealand

Porourangi: Name of ancestor

Rotorua: Rua-Two Roto-Lakes: Name of a city in the North Island of New Zealand

Poutama: A stairway, a stepped pattern

Rangiatea: Spiritual homeland

Tangata whenua: People of the land

Taniwha: Mythical guardian

Te Ara ki te Reo ki Kuirau: The pathway to te Reo Māori

Te Reo Māori: Māori language

Tikanga Māori: Māori customary values and practices, according to Māori customs

Turangawaewae: Place of belonging

Whakapapa: Genealogy

Whakawhanaungatanga: Family relationships

Whānau: Family, people descended from a common ancestor