Kua Tū Tāngata E! Moving a Critical Mass[1]

Iritana Tawhiwhirangi

Introduction

I understand the goal of this book is to document the last twenty-seven years of Māori language revitalisation. In my story, however, starting at this more recent point misses a lot of what I believe is important in terms of the whole Māori language journey. In the last twenty-seven years in particular, we have concerned ourselves with repositioning our right as a people to our language and our tikanga, and in every sense, this is what each chapter in this book illustrates. In writing this, then, I am going to document a personal reflection on this journey of language and tikanga, repositioning, as well as highlighting, my aspirations for the future development of the language – many of which are shared by other authors in this book.

E Raka te Mauī, E Raka te Katau

When I cast my mind back, to when I was about eleven, I cannot help but ask myself why wasn't there the same panic for the Māori language that there is now? Why was there not the same concern or anxiety in Wharekāhika, where I grew up in my hapū? At that time the language was not of major concern because it was strong. Everybody used it in my hapū as a matter of course. What was the concern at the time was actually gaining English because the

[1] Almost all of the titles and sub-titles in this chapter have been drawn from Te Kōhanga Reo waiata, the large majority of which were sung at the Te Kōhanga Reo Waitangi Tribunal claim hearing in March 2012.

hapū was already in charge and in perfect control of te reo Māori. This is important because what happened from that point on led to the language concerns that emerged later and the revitalisation movement as a whole.

When I was eleven, Sir Apirana Ngata arrived at Wharekāhika with the minister of education and other education officials. Of course, at home, whenever our hapū received imminent visitors, the whole hapū came – it wasn't just something for the adults, ngā pākeke, but for the whole hapū. So the school closed – well it didn't really – school for us was being at the marae, and the school principal fell into line with the way the hapū operated. There was no question that we could go to the marae during school hours because it was part of our world. Credit must go to the principals of that time, who understood the values of the hapū and of the old people. So there we were at the marae. Sir Apirana Ngata got up, and after addressing the people, he turned and exhorted the visitors, the minister of education and the officials: 'I want you people to teach my people English, English and more English.' He said this because he had no concern for te reo Māori, it was strong, it was safe. His vision was bilingualism.'E tipu e rea, mo nga ra o tou ao, ko to ringa ki nga rakau a te Pakeha hei ara mo to tinana: ko to ngakau ki nga taonga a o tipuna Maori hei tikitiki mo to mahuna: ko to wairua ki te Atua nana nei nga mea katoa' (Ngata, in Kora, 1965: 5).[2] He did not mean that in pursuing English there should be an undermining of te reo Māori because he had confidence in the hapū having control over the Māori language.

Sir Apirana Ngata, at the time, was a demi-god, not only in Ngāti Porou but also to Māori and non-Māori across the country, so when he made this statement two things happened. Firstly, the old people who were listening suddenly put a value on English because of Ngata saying he wanted it to be taught. It became a taonga for

[2] 'Grow up, little one, in the way of your day and age, your hands grasping the tools of the Pakeha for your physical well-being, remembering in your heart the works of your ancestors which are worthy of being worn as a diadem upon your brow; your soul ever turned toward God, who is the creator of all things' (Kora, 1965: 5 – translation in original text).

them and so they began to try to speak English. At school we were getting English, but the old people were getting none. The old people thought, 'Oh must be he tino taonga te reo nei.'[3] So they began to speak a form of pidgin English, for example, 'key the door', 'broom the floor', and they used phrases like this because they valued English. Ngata also valued the language, but he did not realise the weight of that statement or that the elders would get the wrong end of the stick. Secondly, the government of the day gave absolute credence to what Ngata said. He was no small fry in government and his Pākehā officials were quite zealous in implementing his requests. Generally, if you are told to do something by someone in power, you have to do it, and I believe they were scared stiff of not doing the right thing. The officials went away with the minister of education and were intent on realising the command of Ngata, so out went the message to the education network. The teachers must have thought to themselves, 'Gosh, we have to teach these people English or else,' so out came the strap. What started as a genuine addressing of the English language actually culled te reo Māori. Ngata never meant either of these things to happen, and my anxiety for eminent people is to be careful of what they say. It can be construed in many different ways and the results can be disastrous.

In the years following I went to Hukarere College and we were still speaking Māori, but we also had a very good grip of English. We were growing up in a strong Māori community and we were learning English in the schools. At Hukarere, everything was in English so I had no trouble reading Shakespeare and Dickens. Both languages had become a key part of our lives, and actually, Ngata's vision had been realised. People in my age group who went to colleges such as Te Aute and St Stephens never had an issue with Māori because it was innate; it was part of us. We had not lost anything but had gained a second language. The older generation had not fully realised the decline in the language because when people are comfortable with what they have, themselves, they rarely understand

[3] ...st be a prestigious language.'

what is happening to others. As the education system gained greater control over the business of educating, we had people coming into positions of power who did not understand how important the Māori language was. Because they were all powerful in the domains of the English language, this became the focus. They had no Māori language themselves, and when people do not possess the same skill, they sometimes don't appreciate what others value.

Kua Tipu rā hei Oranga mō te Iwi Māori

I worked in Māori Affairs from 1972 until 1989. I had not been there long when I learned that Pineamine (Pine) Taiapa, a renowned Ngāti Porou leader and carver, was dying. I received a call to visit him because he wanted to talk to me. He was dying of throat cancer and when I got there he was lying on the floor – he preferred to lie on the floor. I sat down beside him and he said to me:

> Kāhore he māharahara mō taku mate. Pai ana ki ahau kia tere taku haere ki te ao wairua engari ko tāku kē ko taku mamae, ko taku pōuri kua kite au kāore e roa ināianei kua ngaro katoa ngā tikanga o te ao Māori me te reo. Ka ngaro te reo ...[4]

He was crying as he said, 'I don't mind dying as I'm ready to go but my heart aches for the end of te ao Māori [the Māori world] and the language.' We all know ka ngaro te reo, ka ngaro ngā tikanga katoa o te ao Māori – you cannot deal with one part of it and not accept that it has a rippling effect on the other.[5] I'll never forget it. I've never forgotten his tears.

In this same decade I also witnessed a massive relocation policy. The families that were moving to the urban areas had never had a home and had never had jobs. The Māori Affairs policy was to move these families to a 'better life'. These people, whilst living rurally, might not have had access to all the modern amenities promised to

[4] 'I'm not fearful of dying. I'm ready to leave for the next life, but what saddens me is that I can see it won't be long until te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are lost for ever. The language is going to die ...'

[5] 'If the language dies all the tikanga of the Māori world die, too.'

them, but they were still strong in speaking Māori. Now they had to measure up to government ideals of living, so not only did they lose their sense of caring for each other but also they lost the value for their language. The requirements of urban living forced them to focus on getting jobs and getting their kids off to school. There was no Māori language in those places. These people lost the opportunity to continue using their language because while they were at work, their kids were at school and the whole emphasis was on English.

Enter Ngā Tamatoa.[6] Those young people at university, born from these urban areas, did not have the Māori language but began to realise that the Māori world, its language and way of living was dissipating. Ngā Tamatoa also represented a kaumātua group who were becoming concerned by this but who lacked the tools to tackle the system. When the doors to the world of education was opened to Ngā Tamatoa, they really became aware of their own lack of Māori language and culture. They were very sharp in understanding the systems operating in government departments so they turned the whole thing on its head. They drove a wedge into the oppression of the English language. Ngā Tamatoa had people like Dun Mihaka, and I pay a tribute to that group, who had the courage and the determination to be able to tackle what was happening to the language and the culture, and it really hit me when they came along because I did not have the same angst as them because I had the language.

There was a time when there was a large number of old people still around to give us a guiding hand. When I came to Wellington I got this office job in Lower Hutt. Māori Affairs was up there alongside Social Welfare and the police. The building was about five storeys high and the canteen was in between. One day in the canteen a Pākehā said, 'It's wonderful having you people here all in the same building.' Jokingly I replied, 'You can't imagine how wonderful it is because we are on top!' They all cracked up laughing. One of them asked me where I got my training from, because everybody

[6] Young warriors. Although the name in Māori is traditionally more representative of male warriors, there were also many Māori women who were instrumental figures in the movement.

associated training with university – sometimes it is the worst place to go. I told them I went to the most frightening university in the country, the University of Ngāti Porou. 'Iritana, your skirts are too short.' 'Kāore au i kite i a koe i te karakia i te Rātapu nei.'[7] I walked the gauntlet from one end of Ngāti Porou to the other, where all the old people were monitoring me, up and down the coast. To these Pākehā it might have been seen as criticism, but in Māoridom it is seen as caring, a desire for you to get it right. Those people have all gone now. Today, the bulk of Māoridom is upside down – more of the younger generations – and we cannot rely on the old people anymore. In many cases they did not know the systems so they never challenged them. Rather, they just sat there like Pine Taiapa, on the floor, dying, crying, because while he was a magic guy in Ngāti Porou, he was nothing when it came to the system of government. Some people like Te Rangihau, Sir James Henare, Canon Wi Huata and Nanny Francis Williams picked it up quickly, but we do not have the people now of that reanga (generation).

Young Māori are going into government departments and I feel sorry for them because when they get in there they have to sing the tune. They get shackled in there and it takes a lot of courage to stem the tide of integration. Sometimes I'll meet one and think 'hallelujah!' Then I meet a few more and I think, 'God help us, how can we bring you back?' I feel optimistic about the future because younger generations have the Māori heart, the tools, the understanding of the world we live in, and there are enough to realise the dreams and the aspirations of those old people. But they need to know the systems so they can toss them up into the air, kick them and challenge them when needed.

Kua Tū Tangata Tātou

In 1977 a whole lot of things were having a negative impact on Māori in the cities. Although the Māori language was still a major thread of Māoridom at the time, it was not until the inception of Tū

[7] 'I didn't see you at church on Sunday.'

Tangata, under Māori Affairs, that our people started to turn around and tell us that being Māori and speaking Māori was important.[8] The thrust, originally started by Ngā Tamatoa, was picked up by Tū Tangata when Ngā Kaiwhakapūmau i te Reo Māori (Ngā Kaiwhakapūmau) was set up on The Terrace in Wellington. I was there to meet a few people about something and that is how it started. There were people there who wanted te reo to be a Tū Tangata project. Māori Affairs allowed people to set up Tū Tangata project groups and this particular group wanted Māori language.

However, the Department of Māori Affairs was under siege from Māoridom because of the precarious position of Māori people. In 1975, Kara Puketapu and Māori Affairs called Māori people together, just before Tū Tangata emerged because people like Kara Puketapu, Neville Baker, Anne Delamere and myself were concerned about what was happening to our people and to the language. The Department of Māori Affairs was not taking into account the views of the people and was only focusing on education and business as the panacea for well-being. The Māori people in the department spoke to Duncan MacIntyre, Minister of Māori Affairs at the time. At the Māori Welfare Officers' conference, Neville Baker presented to the minister, on our behalf, saying that we wanted a review of the Department of Māori Affairs to ask Māori staff and Māori in the community how they felt about the department's performance. We also asked that the review be conducted on marae around the country. We did not want the review people to sit in Wellington and call for written submissions because Māori are not into writing their case. Unless you go to the rohe you will only have a few Māori, such as Donna Awatere and Dun Mihaka – all of them very good, but you need the critical mass of Māori people to speak.

Puketapu was appointed to carry out the review and when he came back in 1976 and tabled the report he was immediately appointed the secretary of Māori Affairs. I thought it very important that the man who did the review was now the man who was going

[8] The Tū Tangata initiative was a community programme of the Department of Māori Affairs set up in the late 1970s.

to drive the waka. He came in and said to us, 'I want to have a national hui and I want the people to come to Wellington and tell us what is important for them.' He asked for ten people from each of the twelve districts so we had a group of 120 people, a mixture of old and young, men and women. So these very powerful people came, selected by their descent: Sir James Henare, John Rangihau, arā kē atu, arā kē atu.[9] In 1981 we had two hui, which we called Hui Whakatauira, and the people decided what the Māori Affairs policies should be. Number one was te reo. Out at Waiwhetū, the group of kaumātua there said, 'Me mutu tā tātou tatari mā te Tari Mātauranga te reo nei e whakaora, me mutu. Ahakoa pēhea ō rātou whakaaro mō tā tātou e inoi nei, kore rawa e ea i a rātou.'[10] One problem with the Department of Education trying to incorporate te reo was that they focused on the grammar. The kaumātua said, 'Hika, ko tō mātou hiahia kia taea e mātou te whakawhitiwhiti kōrero me ā mātou mokopuna. Taihoa ētahi atu take e pā ana ki te reo engari me tīmata mai ki te kōrero, ina whānau mai ana.'[11] You have to get in early. You know it is interesting early intervention is the keyword today, but our old people had that magic way back then. It has taken all these years for Pākehā to realise that if you do not get to the families early, whether it is their health or their language or whatever, it will never hit the same heights. It will always be a struggle. Out of Tū Tangata and those Hui Whakatauira came a whole lot of exciting kaupapa Māori, the return to the marae and the value of the land, for example, and of course, Te Kōhanga Reo.

Mauria Mai ngā Tamariki ki Te Kōhanga Reo

At the inception of Te Kōhanga Reo in 1982, I was the National Manager for Community Affairs at the Māori Affairs Department,

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[9] Among others

[10] 'We should stop waiting for the Education Department to revitalise this language, let's stop waiting. No matter how they respond to what we're asking for, they'll never ever achieve it.'

[11] 'Gee, all we want is to have a conversation with our grandkids. All those other things can wait, for now it should start with speaking, from the moment they're born.'

a position I held until the disbandment of the department in 1989. I resigned just beforehand as I had taken up the position of trustee on the Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust Board. From 1990 until 2002 I was the CEO of the Trust. It was a joy to watch the kaupapa flourish. It was Dr Tamati Reedy's idea to fully immerse children in the language, in the same way that they learn language in the home (Tawhiwhirangi, 2011: 3). Unlike other early childhood services, these were not set up as preparatory institutions to get kids ready for school. The focus was a more holistic 'learning for life' kind of education (Tawhiwhirangi, 2011: 3). The kaupapa had five key aspects:

- the entire well-being of the whānau
- full immersion in te reo Māori
- whānau decision-making
- learning and training
- wider matters, such as health, employment and economics (Tawhiwhirangi, 2011: 4)

We assumed that when the relationship between Te Kōhanga Reo and the Māori Affairs Department stopped, another similar relationship would be built with the Ministry of Education. The relationship we had fostered with Māori Affairs was one where the kaupapa was supported by the Crown, while the Trust could make their own governance and financial decisions.

It became very clear over the next few years that this relationship was not to continue. Our treaty partnership had been severed and a new relationship was to form whereby we would become part of the Ministry of Education machine. Kōhanga buildings on marae were deemed haphazard, our kaumātua were considered too ill-equipped to educate our children. Our 'natural, whānau and marae-based institutions' were going to be replaced with foreign, awkward early childhood education centres (Tawhiwhirangi, 2011: 6). We have worked tirelessly with the Ministry to educate them on how things work in the Māori world, but you can only teach those who want to engage. As kōhanga continued to open, at impressive rates, we were stuck between a rock and a hard

place: did we succumb to the pressure of the Ministry in order to receive funding or did we turn our whānau away from their language and culture? It had to be the former if we were to gain some ground for our people.

In 1999 the whānau of Te Kōhanga Reo demanded that action be taken by the Trust. The following year the Trust board approached the Crown asking that there be a direct relationship created as treaty partners. The result was the Gallen report (2001), which recommended a tripartite be formed between Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Education and us. The inaugural agreement was signed early 2003. While the intention was good, the result was the opposite of what we wanted. Each meeting brought new faces from the other sides. We would begin to establish a new relationship every time this happened, which meant we never progressed. Kōhanga continued to decline and we continuously endured a one-way relationship.

Like many kaupapa Māori, we have been open-minded, helpful and willing treaty partners – we are not the problem. The problem is that in our relationship with the Crown, 'we have been treated as a matter of process rather than substance' (Tawhiwhirangi, 2011: 9). This culminated in the release of the Early Childhood Taskforce report, *An Agenda for Amazing Children* (2011). We had hoped to meet with the taskforce to ensure that the recommendations of the report would not relate to our kōhanga (Olsen-Ratana, 2011: 7). Hence we were not surprised that we were not included in the review process. When the report was released, however, it made several direct recommendations about kōhanga, despite the fact that the taskforce had not been to any kōhanga or talked to the board. The report (2011: 145) recommended:

- a tripartite relationship agreement be drawn up between the Trust, the Ministry of Education and Te Puni Kōkiri, to enhance the Trust's current relationship with the Government
- that the Trust allows kōhanga reo to receive capital funding through the Trust from the Ministry of Education's

Discretionary Grants Scheme without incurring repayments by them to the Trust

- that the Government agrees to a process to support future funding commitments previously met by the Property Putea [sic] including, specifically, funding for Te Arahiko, Māori language training, resource development and research[12]
- the devolution of kōhanga from the Trust to iwi within five years, facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Te Puni Kōkiri.

We formed our response (see Te Kōhanga Reo Trust Board, 2011a; 2011b), although it has not been taken seriously.

All of these factors led to the board lodging a claim of urgency with the Waitangi Tribunal. An initial hearing on 17 and 18 August 2011 resulted in the Tribunal announcing they would grant a full hearing under urgency. The hearing took place over two weeks from 12–23 March 2012 (Waitangi Tribunal, 2012: 12). The Tribunal's report, *Matua Rautia: The Report on the Kōhanga Reo Claim*, was released in October 2012. The Trust's main objective is to have its own legislative relationship with the Crown, and although this did not appear in their recommendations, the Tribunal proposed the following:

- that the Crown appoints an interim independent advisor to oversee the implementation of the Tribunal's recommendations
- that the Crown oversees and facilitates the urgent completion of a multi-faceted work programme developed by the parties in accordance with the tripartite agreement for improving participation and quality in kōhanga reo
- that the Crown, through the Ministry of Education and Te Puni Kōkiri, discusses and collaborates with the Trust to scope and commission research on the effects and impacts of the kōhanga reo model

[12] Te Arahiko is a text and information word-processing qualification administered by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust.

- that the Crown, through the Ministry of Education, Te Puni Kōkiri, and the Trust, informs Māori whānau of the relative benefits for mokopuna in attending kōhanga reo with respect to te reo Māori and education outcomes
- that the Crown formally acknowledges and apologises to the Trust and kōhanga reo for the failure of their policies to sufficiently provide for kōhanga reo. (adapted from Waitangi Tribunal, 2012: 339–340)

To date, only the first of these recommendations has had movement, with Sir Michael Cullen being appointed the independent advisor (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Me Hoe Tahi Tātou

Despite our trials and tribulations with the Crown, I believe that the way we can move forward is to engage a critical mass of Māori people to shift their thinking to the survival of both the language and the culture. The last thirty years has seen a spawning of reo initiatives and that is wonderful. But once you have a network of energy and commitment then you tend to get a duplication of initiatives. Competition and undermining follows this. In the end it becomes a fight for survival. I believe what has happened is that in our drive to reaffirm ourselves as a people, our language and our tikanga, we are actually trying to do it in a silo sort of manner. All that energy is good but we can only do it together. We are so widespread, we are not looking at how we might get maximum lift for our language and our culture by planning together. The Government has thrown out the carrots here, there and everywhere and our people have reached for what they want and I think that is good. I value every initiative; as Māori, we value everybody. Likewise, I am not saying, 'That's Timoti Karetu over there and he's going to be the saviour of it all.' We should not expect him to be the sole driver and what he is doing might be different to what Te Kōhanga Reo is doing, and what Kura Kaupapa is doing, and what Māori Television is doing. There are resources out there but we are all struggling to survive because we have missed a crucial

point: it is the critical mass of everybody planning together that makes the difference. I'm not talking about dismissing anyone but looking at a comprehensive plan that we all design together so that by its very invention it is not cancelling anyone out. It is about the big picture, not just the development of te reo and tikanga, but our world. The last twenty-seven years has given me great optimism and I have no concerns about the future, if we can stitch ourselves together in this way.

The flagship of today is collaboration, collectivisation, integration and all the other '-ations' you can think of, but we become our own architects of demise, proficient in pushing water uphill. We have now got hundreds of stakes in the ground but how can we build the house so all of our initiatives can be valued? It is difficult to try and bring people together but it needs to be done in a sound Māori framework. Whether we are talking about our land, settlements or whatever else, if our cultural Māori framework is lost we will not know where we are going. We spend so much time fighting in courts and arguing the toss, yet Māori existed when there was little in the way of monetary resources – we had the sea, the forests, the rivers, the mountains, our language and our cultural way of living and we did not need money. People often say you cannot transplant those ideals into urban situations. I say, 'Try me!' We can do it alright but we have got to do it against an onslaught from a culture that says, 'Mehemea e hiahia ana koutou ki te tae ki ngā maunga teitei, ānei kē.[13] We must be rooted in te reo Māori, tikanga and understanding how being Māori is something to be proud of – not by putting other cultures down but by showing respect because respect is what we want. That goes for both sides of the treaty coin. If you are having a partnership there should be mutual respect and we should be all on a level that strengthens our country.

The individual is still important, however. What kōhanga, kura kaupapa, wānanga (tertiary institutions) and Panekiretanga

[13] 'If you want to get to the top of the mountain, do it this way.'

(Māori language excellence academy; see Gloyne, this volume) are all doing is motivating and exciting. However, in case we get a little bit too smug and a little bit too self-satisfied, we can always improve on what we are doing. We have a whole host of services providing the language, but at the end of the day, they are there for those who opt to come. Everybody wants the language but a lot are frightened to approach it, so we have to look at not only what are we providing but also how we are reaching those who want the reo but are too scared to go for it. When you have that situation you have to intervene early and get into the homes. I am very wedded to the idea of the language in the home.

Kei a Koe, kei Ahau, Whatu mai, ka Whati atu

The other day I was in a hui and there was a whole lot of discussion that predicts an exciting future. We were talking about this collective where we get our people together and have a comprehensive discussion where everyone contributes and we all know who is doing what. Someone, I think it was Rahera Shortland, said, 'Why can't we start by having a reo and tikanga summit?' There was silence. One of the problems is that we have never had the money to run our own summit. All we do is go to other summits with external agendas. I get fed up by being called to meetings so someone can pick my brain and come up with conclusions that do not reflect exactly what I said. We need to put in some key objectives, to stitch us together – a first step for us is to have a discussion, not about iwi versus iwi, whānau versus whānau, but about harnessing our collective strengths and engaging in our collective thinking. There are many groups to include, for example, ngā reo irirangi (Māori language radio stations), Māori Television, Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (Māori Language Commission), but when they do come, they will come purely as Māori people, thinking about te reo and tikanga, and planning together. I do not want to separately hear about what everyone is doing – if we do not yet know what everyone is doing, where on earth have we been? If we are going to change things it has to be as a critical mass. That critical mass can bowl over Government, for sure, but we do not have to bowl

them if we already have our act together. Government is looking for answers and we need to get their understanding of Māori aspirations. Our problem is we are going on *their* road to find solutions that should be ours but do not end up being ours. Te reo and tikanga do not belong to one institution, they belong to all initiatives of te reo: Ngā Kaiwhakapūmau, Māori Womens' Welfare League, wānanga, Te Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa, Te Ataarangi (a Māori language immersion programme, see Higgins and Muller and Kire, this volume), Māori Television, Māori Radio and all the others. They might be funded by Government but it does not matter – they are being funded for te reo. If we are going to protest in the future it has got to be all of these groups. Which comes first, the protest or the summit; it is the chicken and egg question. Do we get the summit, which will realise where we should head or do we call these groups to fight a fight? Either way is possible but only time will tell.

Kia Māori ā-reo, kia Māori ā-wairua

Making the language official has anaesthetised our people in regard to valuing the language as if it is all done and dusted and there is no need to worry anymore. We need to understand that one swallow does not make a summer. I think the Māori Language Act should be amended to enable Māori cultural frameworks to be allowed to happen without dragging us into other domains. When we are talking about the Treaty, it is not about one lot absorbing the other. The strength we have as Māori, when we use it properly, is understanding the Pākehā world and knowing what we can take from it and what we do not want. We know that world but that world does not know us, and when people are expected to change or do something they do not understand they batten down the hatches. If we can get a bill or act that says it values understanding, there is no question in my mind that Māori people will 'wake up' from this anaesthetic.

Kei Māori noa iho te Kupu

The notion of competitive dependency means we are all competing for our own thing. This has conditioned our people to lose sight

of the collective nature that would have come out of those Hui Whakatauira. It is dishonest if we purport that te reo and tikanga is still the essence of our being, when often it is not. I can remember when the whole devolution of Te Kōhanga Reo to iwi came up in the early nineties and a woman said, 'You know, Iritana, all we've got with iwi is a shift from the tyranny of government to the tyranny of iwi.' I could see her point, but unfortunately we have been programmed that way. Whatever conditioning we have had, deep in the heart of every Māori is the desire to be Māori. There are a lot of Māori who do not believe in te reo and that is a sad reality but you can turn anyone around as soon as you touch somebody's life and say, 'We need you, you know, you are part of our ancestry.' You just have to be proud of your people. It is wonderful when people can be proud of what they are doing for their communities, but what worries me is that sometimes pride of self takes precedence over pride as a people.

I believe the marae is the university, the whare wānanga o te ao Māori.[14] We have moved away and we need to get back there. Once I asked a group of people how they were reaching out to families who did not want to come near the marae. They said, 'Well, Iritana, we go out to these families to help them and we are helping them this way and we are helping them that way ...' I said, 'Stop talking about you helping because the idea is for Māori to take responsibility for themselves. You are talking like the Pākehā system.' They said they weren't, but they were talking about a service delivered on the basis where they had all the answers. We need to go out and say, 'I need help. We need you.' The people in that service were good people, but they were so in love with what they were doing that they couldn't see what they weren't doing. I often hear people say they have twenty people or thirty families depending on them. How can you feel good about that? How can you have families so dependent on you that they become part of your belt notches? I've never been prepared to take responsibility for another person. I think it is demeaning, devaluing and affords

[14] The university of the Māori world.

them no dignity. It also programmes people to expect it because you take their responsibility away. We have to be careful about doing something for somebody, even though it makes us feel good: 'They need me. I'm feeling bloody good about all these people. I've got all the means to run their lives for them.' Good people are not allowing other good people to grow.

When you get a critical mass of people moving it changes minds and it only takes one person to make that change. John Rangihau, he was great at breaking through the bullshit. Once there were about two hundred Māori welfare officers up in Auckland and we were in the room waiting for the minister to arrive. We were all chatting away and Rangihau was just casually pacing the room. 'Koutou mā, anō tō koutou rite ki te bell-wether sheep,' he said before leaving the room.[15] I explained to everyone that a bell-wether sheep has a bell around its neck and it leads the others to slaughter. We were mouthing off about government policies and how many families we were looking after, but it just took one person in that room to switch and then everybody else did. We need that kind of courage today.

Our reo initiatives empower people. Unfortunately, the Pākehā world disempowers, growing fat on the misery of people. The saddest thing perhaps is that Pākehā themselves do not realise this. There is a reluctance to move money from government departments into strengthening the existing Whānau Ora policy. They are powerful departments and do not let money shift easily.

Taku Māoritanga, Mana Motuhake

Kōhanga fighting its battle on its own is a challenge, but te reo and tikanga form the whāriki, the starting point, koirā te whatumanawa o te ao Māori ka taea e tātou tērā te whakatakoto hei kaupapa, hei whāinga mā tātou kotahi.[16] I am a great believer that if people

[15] 'You lot, you are all just like bellwhether sheep'

[16] That is the very heart of the Māori world we can lay down as a framework for all of us to follow collectively.

understand what is important to others they will not fight about it. Part of the problem in the current climate is the Ministry of Education is in a hurry. It can see where we need to be but not everybody in there understands it and if you try to take people anywhere without them understanding and without them knowing they are important in the machinery, you are going to get torpedoed. Actually, it is easy to do if you believe in the potential of the people. While I am not in support of dividing things up, I am in support of separatist positions as long as those positions connect meaningfully to others. We are trying to drive te reo and tikanga through the ministry and it is not working well. Kōhanga is but the beginning of strengthening te reo. There are many on the same pathway – kura kaupapa, other kura initiatives and wānanga, for instance.

I attended a Ministry of Education forum where a paper had been collated for a focus on Māori medium. The first paragraph made me mad because it interpreted Māori medium as being a bilingual approach, which is not what Te Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa are about. Unless we know the difference we will continue to confuse ourselves and others. Māori medium and reo Māori kaupapa are important, but not different. The whole paper was about how each of these can be bent to fit Māori medium in the context of fitting it into the ministry. I even asked for someone to define Māori medium and there was a long silence – no one could do so. Kōhanga Reo and kura kaupapa do not belong in a Māori-medium paddock in the corner. In terms of bilingualism, kei te pai, but Māori medium is not the same as Māori immersion. I admire their attempts to have bilingualism but I have a problem with people treating us the same, yet unequally. Māori immersion is about te reo, the whānau and everybody being involved. It is not about mere Māori medium. The Ministry of Education has enough to do and why they think they can deal with Māori immersion is beyond me.

There is no way that the five recommendations from the Waitangi tribunal claim should be swept aside. Perhaps if we had a minister designated solely to Māori development we would not have to subject ourselves to the whim of other departments.

The Ministry of Education has been trying to buy our confidence by offering some more money for kōhanga reo buildings. I don't want that. Putting up million-dollar buildings is stupid because once you get 150 kids in those buildings you will lose the families – it becomes a bureaucratic operation. It has to because of the size of it. The intimacy with families is gone and that is not Māori immersion. All that would be is another mainstream operation.

I have tried to be proactive for years. Even though there was pressure to go to the Waitangi Tribunal with a claim, and there were people such as Howard Fancy, who was as helpful as possible except the minister always has the last say.[17] Sitting around the table, Te Kōhanga Reo are always the constant ones, the Ministry of Education are not. Our case never changes but the ministry's does. I often told the ministry's officials that working with and through them was like sitting in a revolving door due to the constant personnel changes. Six or seven meetings would pass and they would finally understand our kaupapa then we would have to start all over again. I do not want to walk away from our relationship with the ministry because I am trying to get mutual understanding. But there comes a time when you have to go if you are not getting anywhere. It is an act of legislation that has to occur and that is one thing I hope comes out of the arena in the future.

Hei Whakakapi

It is easy for us to write about the wrongs and I think we need to know about them, but I am more interested in deciding what our moves are to counter them. The last twenty-seven years has reversed, or tried to reverse, that 'Māori-language-won't-get-you-anywhere' whakaaro (belief), which became the rationale for disregarding te reo Māori. Starting with Ngata's statement in this essay was a deliberate move because he is often blamed for creating this rationale but he was misinterpreted. History wrongly tells us, in quite emphatic terms, that it was an anti-Māori statement, but it

[17] Howard Fancy was the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Education 1996–2006.

was not. It was about being bilingual, and as the years went by the opposite was somehow embedded and English was deemed more important – a shift in value occurred. The authors within this book examine and report on how Māoridom has managed this shift in the last twenty-seven years. The strength shown in the vestiges of the old people now lies with the whānau of the te reo Māori initiatives. We still have enough people to bed that in, but we need to do it together.

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