

## Te Kōhanga Reo Māori Language Revitalization

JEANETTE KING

*University of Canterbury  
Māori Department  
Christchurch, New Zealand*

The purpose of this essay is to describe the Kōhanga Reo movement in New Zealand, to attempt to determine some aspects of its success and limitations, and to point out its relevance for broader interests in language revitalization in general.

Te Kōhanga Reo ('the' + 'nest' + 'language', language nest) is an early-childhood language immersion program developed by the Māori community in response to the realization that few children were being raised as speakers of the language.<sup>1</sup> Kōhanga Reo aim to provide an environment where children will hear only the Māori language and will therefore grow up speaking Māori. As might be inferred from the word "nest" in the English translation "language nest," the movement focuses on facilitating language revitalization within the context of the *whānau* (the Māori concept of family).

From its beginnings in the early 1980s the movement had grown by 1998 to include over 600 Kōhanga Reo operating throughout New Zealand. Te Kōhanga Reo has been the spearhead of the language revitalization movement in New Zealand, particularly in shaping new educational options for Kōhanga Reo graduates. For example, bilingual classes in mainstream schools and Kura Kaupapa Māori ('school' + 'philosophy' + 'Māori', Māori-philosophy schools) are now well established in response to the demand from parents for continued education through the medium of Māori.

The growth of Te Kōhanga Reo and other education-based revitalization strategies has required the development from scratch of an infrastructure, the training of staff, and the development of resources. This has involved Māori people in a phenomenal organizational effort. There is an ongoing shortage of teaching resources in Māori as well as of qualified teachers who can teach in Māori. Owing to the speed of

the program's development and expansion, to date there has been little qualitative assessment of the achievements and role of Te Kōhanga Reo in the revitalization of the Māori language.

There is a distinct Māori terminology which is used in describing Te Kōhanga Reo and its associated concepts. Many of these words are used in this chapter both to reveal the use of such language by participants and to avoid problems of definition. A glossary is included at the end of the chapter.

The use of these Māori words within the movement serves a number of functions. The main one is to convey concepts for which the Māori word is the most appropriate, there being only a clumsy alternative in English. Other words for which there is a translation, such as *tamariki* 'children', are often used in the English of Kōhanga Reo parents to signal support for the Māori language (King 1995) and also to reflect a Māori cultural outlook.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Māori is one of the small group of eastern Polynesian languages in the very large Austronesian family. Migration by Polynesian ancestors across the Pacific over several millennia led to the settlement of New Zealand in about AD 1000. Over the following 1,000 years several mutually intelligible dialects of Māori developed throughout the country (Biggs 1968, 65). Rarotongan and Tahitian are the languages to which Māori is most closely related (Biggs 1994, 96).

Initial contact by Europeans occurred in 1642 with the arrival of Abel Tasman, followed in the late 1700s by several voyages by James Cook. At this time the Māori population is estimated to have been around 100,000 (Rice 1992, 11).

European whalers, sealers, and missionaries began arriving in New Zealand from about 1800 onward, and Māori was the language of trade and exchange of ideas between the two cultures at this time. In particular, the missionaries, working at first in the northern districts, decided that their task would be most effective if they were to teach and preach to Māori in the indigenous language. To facilitate their use of Māori, the missionaries produced an orthography as well as grammars and dictionaries of the Māori language.<sup>2</sup>

The 20 phonemes of the language (10 consonants and 5 vowels, the vowels having both a short and a long form) were represented in an alphabet by a Professor Lee of Oxford University in 1818, when the Ngāpuhi chiefs Waikato and Hongi Hika journeyed to England (McRae 1991, 4). This orthographical system has remained virtually unchanged.<sup>3</sup>

Teaching of reading and writing in Māori at the mission schools reached a peak in the 1830s (Rice 1992, 143–44). It is argued that at this time there were proportionately more Māori literate in Māori than there were English people in England literate in English (Biggs 1968, 73). Many catechisms and religious texts were disseminated throughout the country as Māori lay preachers took their religious message and their literacy skills to the farthest regions of the land.

The effect of this widespread literacy amongst the Māori was the production of a prodigious amount of manuscript material written in the Māori language. Much of this survives to this day in private and public collections in New Zealand and abroad. In addition, government, church, and Māori presses produced newspapers and periodicals.<sup>4</sup> This written material, ranging in subject from land issues to mythology and poetry, has wider significance as arguably the largest body of writing which survives from an indigenous colonized people produced within a generation of European contact (Orbell 1995, 19, 21).

With the arrival of English settlers from 1840 onward, a colonial government and infrastructure was established. Initially Māori was still the main language of communication between the newcomers and the Māori, with the government employing licensed interpreters to translate letters and documents for official correspondence with the Māori populace. By 1858 a census recorded a total Māori population of 56,000. Until just before the turn of the century, lack of immunity to Western diseases and warfare further reduced the Māori population to 42,000 (Pool 1977, 237).

The progressive change to English as the main language between the two cultures was formalized in the passing of the 1867 Native Schools Act, which made English the language of literacy in schools. The effect of this change was profound: the Māori language was virtually outlawed in schools, and many Māori schoolchildren over the succeeding generations were punished for speaking the language of their home.<sup>5</sup>

The effect of this policy and the changing social climate is demonstrated in the language of letters in the Tairaroa col-

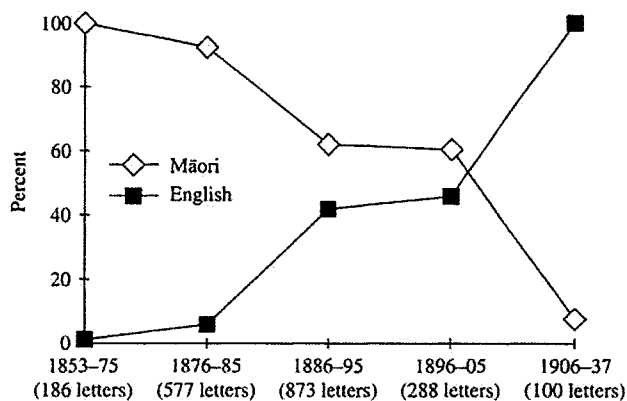


FIGURE 11.1 Percentage of letters written in Māori and English in selected time bands in the Tairaroa Collection. Reprinted with permission from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust Resource Manual 1985, p. 2.

lection.<sup>6</sup> These 2,084 letters, written by both Māori and government officials, cover the period from 1853 to 1937.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 11.1 shows an accelerated decrease in the use of Māori language after 1885; by 1905 more letters were being written in English than Māori. This trend was led by government ministers and officials, who increasingly wrote in English toward the end of the century, and the replies from Māori began to follow this official lead. This graph illustrates how, for Māori people, English replaced Māori as the language of officialdom and government—the language of power.

However, Māori was still the language of the home and community, with all the estimated 45,000 Māori in 1900 being speakers of the Māori language (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1995a). By the mid-1970s there were about 70,000 fluent speakers of Māori (Benton 1981, 15), but they constituted only 18–20% of the Māori population and were virtually all aged 50 and over. Moreover, there were only a couple of small rural localities where Māori was still the community language.

The gradual shift from Māori to English as the language of the home was linked in various communities to the two world wars, the 1930s depression, urban drift in the 1960s, and the introduction of television (Benton 1991). Those centers of Māori population closest to larger towns and cities were affected sooner than remote heartlands. However, in general, Māori was still the predominant language in most Māori homes until World War II (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1996, 19).

During this time there were also many Māori parents who believed that a good knowledge of English was essential to their children's ability to obtain work and status within the now dominant and pervasive Pākehā (New Zealanders of European background) community. As a result, many Māori parents consciously chose not to speak Māori to their children in the home.

By the 1970s the main domains for the use of Māori were the *marae* (tribal community meeting place) and the church. It was in this decade that the seeds of discontent which led to the current Māori language revitalization movement were sown. Groups of young Māori presented petitions to Parliament and successfully campaigned for Māori to be taught in primary schools (Jackson 1993, 215–18). Although Māori had been taught in secondary schools since 1945 and at university from 1951, it was not until 1977, with the opening of the first bilingual school at Rūātoki, that Māori once again became a language of literacy for Māori children. By 1990 the number of bilingual schools had increased to 17 (Nga Kairangahau 1991, 7).<sup>8</sup>

In 1975 the Ngāti Raukawa tribal confederation launched Whakatipuranga Rua Mano ('generation' + 'two' + 'thousand', Generation 2000), a tribal development program which emphasized Māori language revitalization. As part of this program a university, Te Wānanga o Raukawa, was established in Ōtaki in 1981 to provide degree courses in management and Māori language.<sup>9</sup>

The Te Ātaarangi movement, developed in the late 1970s by Katerina Mataira and Ngoi Pewhairangi, focused on language development for adults, giving them an opportunity to learn Māori as a second language using the "silent method" developed by Caleb Gattegno (Boyce 1995, 9). The Te Ātaarangi method uses only Māori as the medium of instruction and typically involves volunteer tutors working with small groups. Te Ātaarangi continues to be very popular and has tutors throughout New Zealand.

In this climate Te Kōhanga Reo was launched in the early 1980s, to be rapidly followed by Kura Kaupapa Māori and bilingual classes in mainstream schools. These developments are discussed in more detail in the next section.

In 1987 the Māori Language Act made Māori an official language of New Zealand and established rules for its limited use in courts. The Māori Language Commission (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori) was also set up under this act with a number of functions, including advising on Māori language issues. Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori also certifies interpreters, coins new vocabulary, and promotes excellence in the language through regular Wānanga Reo ('place of higher learning' + 'language', language camps) for those involved in teaching through the medium of Māori (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1996, 12). Wānanga Reo are typically week-long *hui* (gatherings) for adults where only Māori is spoken and are run on *marae* by the commission as well as other tribal and educational organizations, following a model developed by Te Wānanga o Raukawa in the mid-1970s.

After a successful 1985 claim to the Waitangi Tribunal<sup>10</sup> concerning the Māori language, some radio frequencies were set aside for Māori use with government funding made available for the development and delivery of *iwi* (tribal) stations. The first such station was set up in 1986, and by 1995

there were 23 throughout the country broadcasting in a mixture of Māori and English.<sup>11</sup> A funding body, Te Māngai Pāho, distributes funding to Māori radio broadcasters and also funds a number of television programs in Māori, including a 15-minute, five-day-a-week Māori news program.

The Māori Language Commission designated 1995 Māori Language Year (*Te Tau o Te Reo Māori*, 'the' + 'year/period' + 'of' + 'the' + 'language' + 'Māori'), and this brought government and corporate sponsorship to a number of both once-only and ongoing events and projects focusing on the promotion of the Māori language.<sup>12</sup>

The National Māori Language Survey, undertaken in 1995, found that there are 10,000 to 20,000 fluent speakers of Māori, compared to 70,000 speakers in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> These 20,000 speakers represent about 4% of the total Māori population above the age of 16.<sup>14</sup> The decrease in the number of fluent speakers since the 1970s is to be expected given mortality rates in the intervening period. Further results show that while nearly 60% of Māori can speak Māori to some extent, the vast majority (72%) are low-fluency speakers. This language survey is to be repeated in 2001.

In 1996 the New Zealand census for the first time included a question about language use in the home; 153,669 Māori (29% of the Māori population) indicated that they knew enough Māori to be able to hold an everyday conversation.<sup>15</sup> This question is to be included again in the 2001 census.

Considering these results, one of the key findings of the National Māori Language Survey was that there should be a focus on improving the language ability of the large proportion of Māori adults who "already have some ability in speaking Māori but have low levels of fluency" (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1995b).

## TE KŌHANGA REO AND MĀORI LANGUAGE SCHOOLING

Te Kōhanga Reo had its inception at one of the yearly meetings organized by the government's Department of Māori Affairs from 1979 onward (Government Review Team 1988, 17). At the Hui Whakatauirā held in 1981 the concept and name of Kōhanga Reo were developed.<sup>16</sup> The knowledge that most competent speakers were over 40 years old and that language proficiency is most easily acquired by young children generated the idea of forming language nests where the Māori language could be transmitted from the older generation to children and grandchildren. This founding principle of the Kōhanga Reo movement is illustrated in Figure 11.2, which is taken from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust's Resource Manual (1985a, 2).

The first Kōhanga Reo was officially opened in the Wellington district in March 1982 with funding from the

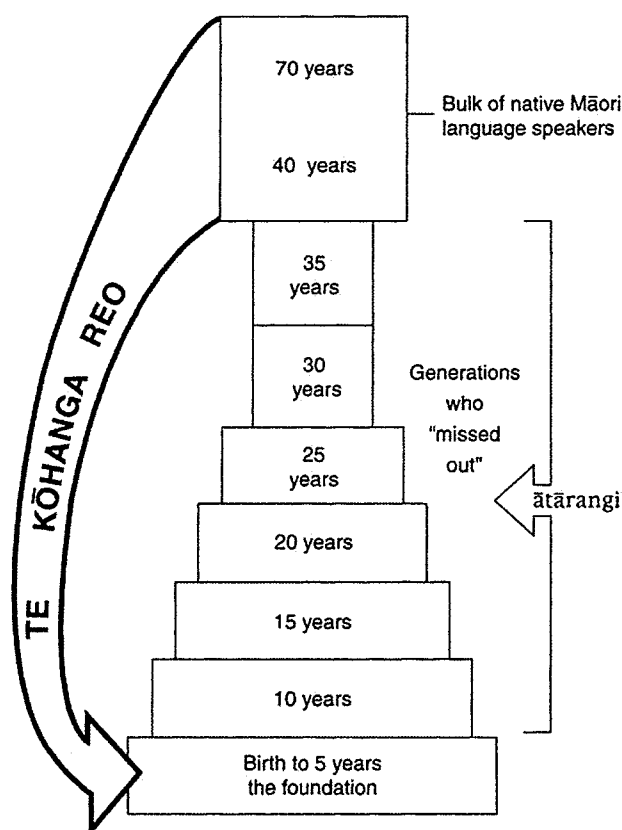


FIGURE 11.2

Department of Māori Affairs. As a “flaxroots” (grassroots) initiative it expanded very quickly, as Figure 11.3 indicates.

An initial rapid expansion phase from the beginning of Kōhanga Reo in 1981 to 1985 was followed until 1993 by a consolidation phase characterized by a steady increase in numbers.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter the number of Kōhanga Reo plateaued, suggesting that a stabilization point had been reached. From 1996 to the latest figures in 1998 both the number of Kōhanga Reo centers and the children participating have decreased. In 1996 there were 767 centers, but this figure dropped to 646 in 1998, with the number of children attending also dropping from 14,000 to 12,000.<sup>18</sup> Reasons for this decline are explored in the next section.

The large number of children attending Kōhanga Reo has not meant a decline in the numbers involved in other early childhood options, indicating that “Kōhanga Reo are catering for a client group previously not catered for by early childhood programs” (Irwin 1991, 78–79).

Since 1991 Kōhanga Reo have provided approximately 20% of all early-childhood services and have become the most popular early-childhood option for Māori children. Between 1992 and 1995 an average of 46% of those Māori

preschoolers participating in preschool programs were attending Kōhanga Reo.

Within a few years of the movement’s beginning, pressure began to build for an extension of Māori-medium and Māori *kaupapa* (philosophy) schooling to continue the Kōhanga Reo experience. Many parents were finding that the transition to mainstream schools was difficult for their children, and the classroom was often not validating the experience that these children were bringing with them.

There were two responses to this need for alternative schooling. One was the development of Kura Kaupapa Māori. These schools have a policy of total immersion in Māori within a Māori philosophical orientation and curricular framework. The first Kura Kaupapa Māori began in Auckland in 1985 alongside a Kōhanga Reo on Hoani Waititi marae. Initially some Kura Kaupapa Māori operated as private schools, but with increased pressure, government funding was gradually secured, and by 1998 there were 60 Kura Kaupapa Māori receiving state funding (see Map 11.1). Students at Kura Kaupapa receive all their curriculum instruction in the Māori language, and some Kura are also now providing secondary level schooling for a total of nearly 500 pupils. In 1998 the 4,505 students attending Kura Kaupapa Māori accounted for 14% of all Māori students undertaking Māori-medium education.

The other schooling option which has developed to cater for Kōhanga Reo graduates is bilingual classes and units in mainstream schools.<sup>19</sup> In 1990, graduates from Kōhanga Reo constituted 40% of bilingual class students (Irwin 1991, 79).

As with Kura Kaupapa Māori, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of mainstream schools which have a bilingual class or unit: from 38 in 1987, to 154 in 1990, to 441 by 1998. The number of students in these classes rose from just

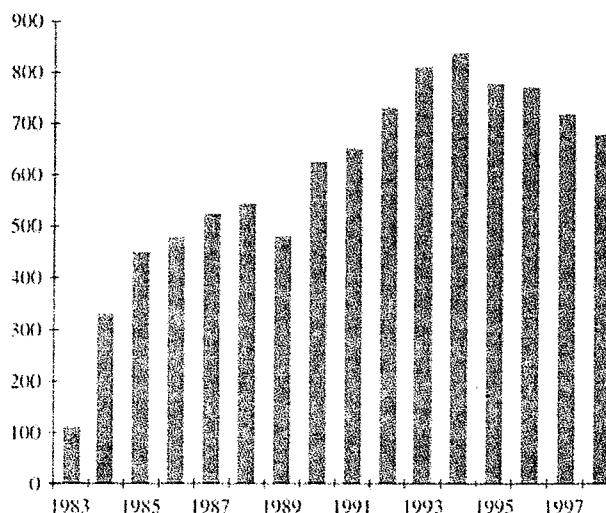


FIGURE 11.3 Number of Kōhanga Reo Centers

under 7,000 to nearly 32,500 between 1990 and 1998. The amount of Māori language used in these classes and units varies from very little to full immersion, but by 1998, 45% of children in these classes were receiving less than 30% of their instruction in Māori. This is one of the main differences between these units and Kura Kaupapa, where pupils receive all their instruction in Māori.<sup>20</sup>

Another difference between Kura Kaupapa Māori and bilingual units is the ethnicity of pupils. Virtually all children attending Kura Kaupapa Māori are Māori, in contrast to the increasing numbers of non-Māori participating in bilingual classes. In 1992, 8% of bilingual class pupils were non-Māori, but by 1998 this had increased to 25%. Most of the non-Māori pupils (84%) are in programs offering less than 30% of the instruction in Māori.

The effectiveness of immersion teaching in the overall goal of revitalization has yet to be studied, and the fact that in 1990 only one-third of immersion teachers in both Kura Kaupapa Māori and bilingual classes were fluent speakers of Māori reflects the continuing need for qualified teachers with a high level of proficiency in the Māori language (Nga Kairangahau 1991, 36). In 1997 there were nine institutions around New Zealand offering teacher training for immersion teachers,<sup>21</sup> but there is still a demand for qualified teachers, which is not surprising considering the huge growth in the number of immersion classes in recent years. The Ministry of Education is now offering grants and other incentives to attract people into Māori immersion teacher training.

Parents of Kōhanga Reo graduates typically choose between a bilingual unit and a Kura Kaupapa Māori for their child's schooling needs. Such decisions often depend on the availability of options and the perceived quality of the program. Some choose bilingual education because of concern that their child may not become competent in English if placed into an exclusively Māori-medium institution, despite research and information to the contrary.<sup>22</sup>

Conversely, some Kōhanga Reo parents choose Kura Kaupapa Māori because of real concerns that their child's ability in Māori will decline if they are placed in a bilingual class within a mainstream school where English is the peer group playground language.

### Goals and Details of the Kōhanga Reo Program

The principle aim of Kōhanga Reo is to raise Māori children as speakers of Māori in a whānau environment which will "affirm Māori culture" (Government Review Team 1988, 20). The word *whānau* traditionally referred to an extended kin group. The meaning of the word has evolved in recent times, and "new kinds of whānau have emerged, modeled on the traditional whānau and its values" (Metge 1995, 17). Kōhanga Reo whānau consist of a range of people,

mostly Māori,<sup>23</sup> and while not all will be related, there are often a number of kinship ties amongst the participants in any one Kōhanga Reo.

In order to achieve the stated aims of Te Kōhanga Reo, the commitment of people to the kaupapa and the whānau are very important. Most Kōhanga Reo make a great effort to ensure that new parents understand that Māori is the only language to be spoken in the Kōhanga, and that parents are expected to provide a Māori-speaking environment at home. Active participation in the whānau's decision making is also required through attendance at the regular whānau meetings. Each Kōhanga Reo is controlled and run by the collective group of teachers, parents, local elders, and members of the Māori community. The whānau as a whole are responsible for the day-to-day administration and running of the Kōhanga Reo.

The particular features of Māori culture that are to be found in the Kōhanga Reo include Māori customs (such as keeping cleaning items for kitchen and toilet facilities separate, not sitting on tables, and so on) and an emphasis on such aspects as *whakapapa*, *whanaungatanga*, and *tuakana/teina* (Ka'ai 1990, 14–15). *Whakapapa* 'genealogy' forms an important part of *mihi* (formalized greetings), in which the child learns the importance of their tribal connections. *Whanaungatanga* (group relationships and support) manifests itself in group responsibility for learning and working together. *Tuakana/teina* (the role of older to younger) is expressed through leadership roles being given to older children with concurrent responsibilities toward the needs of those who are younger.

Nearly half of all Kōhanga Reo are marae based (45% in 1990), and they typically care for 10 to 20 children, though individual Kōhanga Reo range in size from as few as 5 children to as many as 60 (Government Review Team 1988, 35). Children can attend from birth to age six, although many Kōhanga Reo will not take babies under one year of age, and most children leave to attend school at age five.<sup>24</sup> Most Kōhanga Reo are open on weekdays from 9 AM to 3 PM, and a number provide early and late care.

Most Kōhanga Reo have a range of activity equipment, often with an emphasis on natural materials such as flax, water, and wood. One of the ongoing difficulties facing Kōhanga Reo has been the relative lack of appropriate teaching and developmental resources in Māori. This has resulted in much valuable energy being devoted, often in each individual Kōhanga Reo, to producing play equipment using Māori language as well as to finding visual resources which do not depict white people exclusively.

Kōhanga Reo are funded by the government via Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust through quarterly grants based on the number and the ages of the children on the roll. Most Kōhanga also charge fees above this to cover salaries, teaching resources, utilities, and other costs. The level of this fee

is set by each whānau, but it is generally less than other child-care options.

The organizational connections between Kōhanga Reo and Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust have changed several times since the beginnings of the movement, with various numbers of intermediate structural levels. The current structure is for Kōhanga Reo to be grouped into districts, each serviced by a *kaupapa kaimahi* ('philosophy' + 'worker') employed by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust. In addition, all Kōhanga have computers and are in communication with the National Trust via the Internet.

Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust is a registered charitable trust. Besides administering finances, the other roles of the National Trust are to develop and implement training for kaiako, produce resources, give leadership to the movement, and work in the political arena (the trust is headquartered in Wellington, the seat of government).

The trust board consists of nine representatives from national groups such as the Māori Education Foundation, the Māori Women's Welfare League, and the Māori Language Commission, along with a few invited members. There are no elected members. Thus Kōhanga Reo have no direct influence on national decision making.

Figure 11.3 showed that the numbers of Kōhanga Reo have declined by 173 since a peak of 819 in 1994. Enrollments at Kōhanga Reo have also suffered: from 1995 to 1998 they have fallen from 14,263 to 12,050 despite the fact that overall numbers of Māori preschoolers in early-childhood education services remained about 30,000 during this time.

Frustration at feeling unable to question compulsory requirements of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust has led some Kōhanga Reo whānau to withdraw from the trust and to continue their operations with funding via mainstream early-childhood provisions. In 1995 there were 25 Māori total-immersion preschools not connected to the Kōhanga Reo movement (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1996, 30).

Other Kōhanga Reo may have closed due to a low enrollment, a lack of whānau support, or difficulties in maintaining either a Māori language environment or an adequate number of qualified staff. A 1997 Education Review Office summary of visits to 100 Kōhanga Reo during 1995 and 1996 noted that 27% of Kōhanga Reo were unable to consistently provide a Māori-speaking environment "because of a lack of Māori language expertise within their Kōhanga Reo" (Education Review Office 1997, 17–18). The decline in numbers of Kōhanga Reo may be a self-pruning of a tree whose branches have grown too far and too fast to be adequately supported by the community.

### Training for Kaiako

The original theory that the language would be "fed" to the children in Kōhanga Reo by older native speakers has not

always been realized. Initially, the older native speakers, mostly women, needed reassurance that they did not need to "teach" the language in a formal manner and that children would acquire Māori by just listening to it. In addition, many of the better speakers were of advancing years and not always able to sustain the energy required for working alongside young children all day.

Younger adults, many of them with child-care and/or teaching qualifications, have embraced the kaupapa of Kōhanga Reo as part of their own personal reclamation of Māori language. They have brought energy and commitment to the Kōhanga Reo movement.

The skills the two types of kaiako bring with them can complement each other well. The older native speaker can provide a high-quality language environment for both children and parents. But this role can be very draining, particularly if there are no similarly proficient speakers in the Kōhanga Reo.

Those kaiako who are second-language speakers of Māori often have skills and training in providing developmentally appropriate child care. However, it can be difficult for these kaiako who may lack proficiency in Māori to be role models and a resource for parents. It is therefore important to support kaiako and whānau by providing effective programs to keep them motivated and learning.

Within a few years of the beginnings of the movement, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust had set up 45 training centers to teach and supervise trainees in completing the "Blue Book" training syllabus.<sup>25</sup> This training was required of those who were acting as kaiako in the Kōhanga Reo.

The syllabus consisted of five modules covering *wairua* (spirituality), Māori customs and practices, health practices (traditional and modern), Māori language, and management and administration. The work in these modules was to be completed over 400 hours and required the trainees to undertake much of the learning themselves, drawing on the expertise of their local community. In addition, trainees were required to do 500 hours of practical work in a Kōhanga Reo.

In 1991 this training scheme was replaced by a more comprehensive training called *whakapakari* (strengthening), which has New Zealand Qualifications Authority accreditation. Taking three years to complete, its aim is to provide training in all aspects of child care, culture, and language that a kaiako will need in a Kōhanga Reo.

The 10 units of learning in the Whakapakari training course are:

- The beginnings and history of Te Kōhanga Reo
- The essence and philosophy of Te Kōhanga Reo
- The Māori language
- The culture of the Māori world
- Teaching and learning
- Human relationships

- Management and administration
- Child development
- Observation and analysis
- Traditional and modern health practices<sup>26</sup>

Those who wish to enter the Whakapakari training must have a reasonably high proficiency in the Māori language. Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust also offers two courses, Te Ara Tuatahi ('the' + 'pathway' + 'first', the first pathway), and Te Ara Tuarua (the second pathway), for Kōhanga Reo adults who have limited language skills; the aim is to bring the participant in three years up to a level where he or she is able to enter Whakapakari training.

Those wishing to enter Whakapakari training must also be working in a Kōhanga Reo and have the support of the whānau. In 1996 there were over 700 people engaged in Whakapakari training,<sup>27</sup> with a key feature of the training being that the whole whānau is involved in supporting the learning of the *ākonga* (student).

Each unit of work is researched within the Kōhanga Reo using the expertise within the whānau. The unit is then presented to the whānau and then to a group of other local *ākonga*, each student being supported by three *kaitautoko* (supporters).<sup>28</sup>

At its best this method of learning involving the whole whānau can substantially benefit everybody participating within a Kōhanga Reo. However, if the Kōhanga has few people with expertise on which to draw, this training process can be frustrating for all concerned.

### Whānau

*"The Kōhanga is constructed by and constructs such concepts as whānau."*—M. K. Hohepa, 1993

The Kōhanga Reo whānau has arguably been one of the strongest forces in the development of the changing concept of Māori whānau in recent times. Since Te Kōhanga Reo began, Metge argues, "there have been signs of increasing participation in whānau, as part of a renewed emphasis on Māori cultural identity" (1995, 17). While traditional whānau are based on kinship ties, the members of Kōhanga Reo whānau are often not related by kinship. Instead, the binding relationship is that of adherence to the kaupapa of Kōhanga Reo. This kaupapa is based on involvement and speaking Māori *i ngā wā katoa, i ngā wāhi katoa* (all the time and everywhere).

The concept of the whānau in Kōhanga Reo has been an important one, particularly at the beginning of the movement. The initial setting up of a Kōhanga Reo involved much work over many years in difficult circumstances. Battling bureaucracy is very time and energy consuming. At one time three government departments maintained an interest in Kōhanga Reo: Māori Affairs, Education, and Social Welfare

(now called Income Support). A strong commitment from individuals was required to make the movement work on both the national and local level, and this was best channeled through group involvement and responsibility in order to offset the real possibility that a few people, usually the kaiako, will burn out.

It is quite usual for those involved with a Kōhanga Reo to talk about taking an issue "to the whānau." The importance and relevance of group decision-making is part of the conceptual construct of the Kōhanga Reo. The Kōhanga Reo is not merely a preschool where one pays for a service. The participants "own" their involvement in a much more tangible way, with the authority vested in the collective, not the individual. The word *whānau* signals a Māori-concept oriented organization which, for many participants, may be their first real link with the Māori community.

The ideal is that each whānau is responsible for raising the skill level of participants in the Kōhanga in areas such as language and management. The benefit is that many people, in particular Māori women,<sup>29</sup> have acquired skills they can and do translate into other employment areas (Government Review Team 1988, 20–26). Whānau involvement in Te Kōhanga Reo has also increased Māori parents' self-esteem (Ka'ai 1990, 8) and encouraged parents who themselves had negative experiences within the school system to effectively pursue schooling options which best suit their children's needs.

But for those Kōhanga Reo that are finding it difficult to provide the linguistic and educationally appropriate environment required for their children, there are few resources for supporting the energies and commitment of the kaiako and whānau. At present Kōhanga Reo are grouped into support clusters, and through this grouping a number of urban Kōhanga Reo have formed very useful and informal relationships of sharing and support with neighboring Kōhanga. But many Kōhanga are still isolated, and the possibilities of cross-fertilization of ideas from other successful Kōhanga Reo are underutilized.<sup>30</sup>

### Te Reo Māori—The Māori Language

It is generally agreed that Te Kōhanga Reo is producing a large number of children who can speak Māori. In my experience, most of the graduates from Kōhanga Reo are reasonably bilingual, with proficiency depending on the length of time the child has been in the Kōhanga Reo and the strength of the language environment the child is exposed to, both in the home and in the Kōhanga.

What is uncertain is the level of proficiency being attained by these children and how effective other educational settings are at expanding and enhancing that language base. The tacit aim of the Kōhanga Reo movement has been to produce a new generation of native speakers of Māori,

who would, in turn, pass the language on to their children. Whether that aim is being achieved, or is able to be achieved, is yet to be determined; further research is needed "to evaluate the impact of the Kōhanga Reo movement on language retention" (Nga Kairangahau 1991, 42).

In the initial stages, developing a dynamic Māori-speaking environment in a Kōhanga Reo was often difficult. Even if the kaiako and parents were speaking Māori, the children were not always speaking Māori in reply. In the beginning many Kōhanga Reo took in older children, aged three or four, who would typically have virtually no command of Māori and who were already speaking English. The effect of the linguistic dominance of these children often took months, if not years, to overcome.

Reaching a stage where children not only used Māori in response to adult speech, but used it naturally to each other in free play, was a step that often took quite a period of time to achieve from the initial setting up of a Kōhanga Reo. However, once a Māori-speaking environment is achieved amongst the children, it will usually continue, especially if most, if not all, new entrants start before they have acquired any language.

One of the areas which has been somewhat neglected in the effort required to set up the necessary infrastructure for the Kōhanga Reo movement has been the role of parents' language use, particularly in the home. Despite an increasing desire for proficiency among many Kōhanga Reo parents, there is often little Māori spoken to the child at home. In most cases the level of language is not much above that of basic instruction ("Hurry up," "Eat your breakfast") or description or explanation ("That's a nice picture," "We're going now"). Chrisp (1997, 3–4), in describing the importance of making Māori a language of the home, contends that there are few strategies in place to address this difficulty.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Te Ātaarangi program was independently developed with adult language acquisition in mind, and many parents involved in Te Kōhanga Reo had their first learning experience with this method. Other language learning environments such as night school, polytechnics, universities, and Wānanga Reo are also popular with Kōhanga Reo parents.

The development by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust of two courses, Te Ara Tuatahi and Te Ara Tuarua, for Kōhanga Reo parents who have limited language skills arose out of recognition of the need to foster and increase the Māori language abilities of those involved in Kōhanga Reo.

In this respect Māori is different from many indigenous languages which are still spoken in the community, but which are not used in the educational setting. In New Zealand, Māori language schooling options are now reasonably well developed, but the use of the language in the home has not advanced in the same dramatic way.

As noted earlier, the 1995 National Māori Language Survey shows a need for courses aimed at increasing the pro-

ficiency of the large proportion of Māori who can already speak some Māori. While there is a reasonable range of courses available for adults to learn Māori, few achieve a high level of proficiency. Most begin at the absolute-beginner level and reach intermediate levels.

It is very hard for a second-language learner to continually provide a language environment when there may be few others with commensurate speaking skills. This is especially the case in the home, with television, radio, newspapers, and most adult interaction being undertaken in the dominant language, English. It is not surprising then that "the children educated through the Māori language do not, in general, speak Māori outside of the educational context because they have no societal context for such use" (Chrisp 1997, 4), nor a range of incentives to speak in Māori (Cooper 1989, 159–60).

In order for Māori to truly regain its status as a community language, children need to hear adults speaking Māori, not just to them, but amongst each other. Otherwise Māori will continue to be a language of the Kōhanga Reo and the school, the marae and the church, and not a language in homes.

## CONCLUSIONS

Te Kōhanga Reo has been an inspiration to language revitalization efforts both within New Zealand and internationally. The movement has given crucial stimulus to a wider social movement within New Zealand which has gained strength and impetus over the last decade and involves a range of educational institutions, broadcasting media, and political groups (Irwin 1992, 87). That nearly half of Kōhanga Reo are located on marae indicates the link with the resurgence and pride in Māori culture which has permeated many levels of society.

Success of the movement in establishing and developing a model of language revitalization amongst young children is owing to the fact that Te Kōhanga Reo was a Māori community initiative. The movement tapped into Māori values and social structure and brought new generations of parents back into a Māori setting from which they had become alienated.

There have been many difficulties, such as securing funding and setting up an infrastructure, associated with developing organizations such as Te Kōhanga Reo from scratch. It is not surprising to realize, therefore, that overall coordination of effort has often been difficult, and that the personal commitment by kaiako and parents has been immense. But the hard work has made the achievements all the more valued.

Benton's research on the use of the Māori language in the 1970s (1978) found that the main domains for Māori were the marae and the church. Recent research confirms these two domains as the most likely places where one can hear

Māori being spoken.<sup>31</sup> With credit to Te Kōhanga Reo and the consequent Māori language schooling initiatives, we now have a third domain to add—that of the educational setting. This is the crowning success of the Kōhanga Reo movement.

With the development phase complete, the aim for the Kōhanga Reo movement, through Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, must be to disseminate further appropriate Māori language resources for Kōhanga Reo children by capitalizing on models of good practice already in use within various Kōhanga Reo. And the focus for language planners is to consolidate and improve whānau proficiency in the Māori language, in particular through focusing on strategies which facilitate the use of Māori language in the home.

### Glossary

- hui** meeting, gathering  
**hui whānau** whānau meeting  
**kaiako** teacher(s)  
**kaumātua** tribal elder(s)  
**kaupapa** theme, philosophy, worldview  
**Kura Kaupapa Māori** Māori philosophy schools (school + philosophy/worldview + Māori). These schools have a policy of total immersion in Māori within a Māori philosophical orientation and curricular framework.  
**marae** tribal community meeting place  
**Pākehā** New Zealanders of European descent  
**Te Kōhanga Reo** Māori language immersion preschool ('the' + 'nest' + 'language', language nest)  
**Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori** The Māori Language Commission ('the' + 'rope' + 'to twist/plait' + object marker + 'the' + 'language' + 'Māori') established under the 1987 Māori Language Act  
**Te Wānanga o Raukawa** a tribal university in Ōtaki which provides degree and diploma courses in management and Māori language to approximately 700 students per year.  
**Wānanga Reo** Māori language-intensive hui for adults which are run on marae ('place of higher learning' + 'language')  
**whānau** Māori concept of family, traditionally referring to a tightly knit extended kin group, but within Kōhanga Reo referring to the group of parents, kaiako, and kaumātua who run the Kōhanga.

### Notes

1. See Benton 1981, 23, for a discussion on the use of Māori language in the home before the introduction of Kōhanga Reo.
2. The first book about the Māori language, *A Korao no New Zealand*, was printed in 1815 by the missionary Thomas Kendall (Biggs 1968, 66).
3. The distinction between *w* (semivowel) and *wh* (voiced bilabial fricative) was incorporated beginning about 1840, and vowel length began to be consistently marked in printed Māori from 1960 onward either by use of the macron or through reduplication of the vowel.
4. For more information on Māori manuscripts and newspapers, see McRae 1991.
5. For a personal account see Walker 1987, 164–66.
6. King 1992. The Taiaroa collection is one of the largest collections of personal papers in the Canterbury Museum archives in Christchurch. Much larger collections of Māori material exist in other national archives, libraries, and museums throughout New Zealand.
7. Of these letters, 83% are written by Māori.
8. Since 1990 many of these bilingual schools have become Kura Kaupapa Māori.
9. Accreditation for degrees offered at Te Wānanga o Raukawa was approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in 1993. Two other tribal universities, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa and Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiarangi, were established in 1983 and 1990, respectively (Winiata and Winiata 1995, 142–45).
10. A government tribunal, instituted in 1975, which investigates cases brought by tribal groups alleging Crown breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, the founding treaty signed in 1840 between representatives of the British Crown and Māori chiefs.
11. A survey in 1991 indicated that the percentage of Māori language broadcast content from these stations ranged between 20% and 85% (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1996, 40–41), but funding is now given preferentially to those stations with very high Māori language content.
12. See Chrisp 1995 for a discussion on Te Tau o Te Reo Māori. The government, through the Lottery Grants Board, distributed \$960,000 in this year to a total of 120 projects, including 88 Wānanga Reo.
13. Statistics are from Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1995b and Te Puni Kōkiri 1998.
14. The 1996 census records the Māori population as being 523,371, 15% of the total New Zealand population of 3.5 million.
15. The wording of the question was: "In which language(s) could you have a conversation about a lot of everyday things?" Tick boxes were provided for English, Māori, Samoan, and New Zealand Sign Language, with space for respondents to list other languages they could speak.
16. See Ka'ai 1990, 6, for an account of the genesis of the name "Kōhanga Reo."
17. Obtaining representative statistics for the years up to 1990 is difficult as Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust and Ministry of Education figures are based on different calendar years. Therefore, the apparent decline in the numbers of Kōhanga Reo in 1989 may well not be accurate.
18. Statistics in this section are from the Ministry of Education annual publications "Education Statistics of New Zealand" and "New Zealand Schools."
19. The term "immersion class or unit" is also gaining currency.
20. Differences between Kura Kaupapa Māori and bilingual classes and some implications for the future are discussed more fully in King 1999.
21. David Kingi, Māori Unit, Ministry of Education, personal communication, October 1997.
22. See, e.g., Keegan 1996.
23. Some non-Māori are parents of Māori children. Many Kōhanga Reo allow children who are not Māori to attend, but overall the numbers of such children are few and make up less than 2% of the total (Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori 1996, 30).
24. In 1997 only 5.2% of children attending Kōhanga Reo were under one year of age and only 3.5% were aged five or over (Ministry of Education 1998).
25. Te Kōhanga Reo Trust certificate syllabus, Te Kōhanga Reo Trust 1985b.
26. New Zealand Qualifications Authority 1992, 9.
27. Cath Stuart, district manager, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, 1996, personal communication.
28. These are people from the Kōhanga Reo who agree to provide extra support for the student for the duration of the training.
29. Like most preschool organizations, Kōhanga Reo are staffed and supported mainly by women. Māori women in particular have been a strong force in political activism in the past 20 years in New Zealand.
30. There have been no national conferences since 1987, and there was no national newsletter for Kōhanga Reo until the Māori Language

Commission began producing a quarterly bilingual newsletter, *Ko Te Whānau*, in 1998.

31. See *Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori* 1995b and *Te Puni Kōkiri* 1998.

## References

- Benton, Richard A. 1978. *Can the Māori language survive?* Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- . 1981. *The flight of the Amokura: Oceanic languages and formal education in the South Pacific*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- . 1991. *The Māori language: Dying or reviving?* Working paper prepared for the East-West Center Alumni-in-Residence Working Papers Series. Hawaii: East-West Center.
- Biggs, Bruce. 1968. The Māori language past and present. In *The Māori people in the 1960s*, ed. Erik Schwimmer, 65–84. Auckland: Blackwood and Janet Paul.
- . 1994. Does Māori have a closest relative? In *The origins of the first New Zealanders*, ed. Douglas G. Sutton, 96–105. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- Boyce, Mary T. 1995. *The role of second language learners in Māori language maintenance and revival up to the year 2010: A discussion document*. Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington.
- Chrisp, Stephen. 1995. *He Taonga Te Reo: The use of a theme year to promote a minority language*. Paper prepared for Te Hui Taumata Reo Māori (Māori Language Summit). Wellington: Māori Language Commission.
- . 1997. Home and community language Revitalisation. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* 3: 1–20.
- Cooper, Robert L. 1989. *Language planning and social change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Education Review Office. 1997. *What counts as quality in Kōhanga Reo*. Wellington: Education Review Office.
- Government Review Team. 1988. *Report of the review of Te Kohanga Reo*. Wellington: New Zealand Government.
- Hohepa, M. K. 1993. *Preferred pedagogies and language interactions in Te Kōhanga Reo*. Auckland: Research Unit for Māori Education, University of Auckland.
- Irwin, Kathie. 1991. Māori education in 1991: A review and discussion. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education* 1: 77–112.
- . 1992. Māori education in 1992: A review and discussion. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education* 2: 71–91.
- Jackson, Syd. 1993. The first language. In *Te Ao Mārama*, vol. 2, ed. Witi Ihimacra, 215–18. Auckland: Reed Books.
- Ka'ai, Tania. 1990. *Te Hīringa Take Take: Mai i te Kohanga Reo ki te Kura*. Master's thesis, University of Auckland, Auckland.
- Keegan, Peter. 1996. *The benefits of immersion education: A review of the New Zealand and overseas literature*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- King, Jeanette. 1992. The Tairāoa collection: A diachronic linguistic analysis of selected letters in Māori. Bachelor of arts honors project, Department of Māori, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.
- . 1995. Māori English as a solidarity marker for Te Reo Māori. *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* 1: 51–59.
- . 1999. Lessons from the Māori schooling experience: Thirteen years of immersion schools. In *Proceedings of the Third Foundation for Endangered Languages Conference, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, National University of Ireland, 17–19 September 1999*, ed. Nicholas Ostler, 117–24. Bath: Foundation for Endangered Languages.
- McRae, Jane. 1991. Māori literature: A survey. In *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, ed. Terry Sturm, 1–24. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Metge, Joan. 1995. *New growth from old: The whānau in the modern world*. Wellington: Victoria University Press.
- Ministry of Education. 1985–99. *Education statistics of New Zealand*. Wellington: The Ministry.
- . 1996–98. *New Zealand schools—Nga Kura o Aotearoa: A report on the compulsory schools sector in New Zealand*. Wellington: The Ministry.
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority. 1992. *QA News* 12. Wellington: New Zealand Qualifications Association.
- Nga Kairangahau. 1991. *Māori education: Current status*. Produced by Nga Kairangahau, Manatū Māori. Wellington: Ministry of Māori Affairs.
- Orbell, Margaret. 1995. *The illustrated encyclopedia of Māori myth and legend*. Christchurch: Canterbury University Press.
- Pool, D. Ian. 1977. *The Māori population of New Zealand, 1769–1971*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.
- Rice, Geoffrey W. 1992. *The Oxford history of New Zealand*. 2d ed. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Te Kohanga Reo National Trust. 1985a. *Resource manual: Te Kohanga Reo National Wananga, Turangawaewae Marae, Ngaruawahia*. Wellington: Te Kohanga Reo National Trust.
- Te Kohanga Reo Trust. 1985b. *Te Kōhanga Reo Trust certificate syllabus*. Wellington: Te Kohanga Reo National Trust.
- Te Puni Kōkiri [Ministry of Māori Development]. 1998. *The National Māori Language Survey: Te Mahi Rangahau Reo Māori*. Wellington: Te Puni Kōkiri.
- Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori. 1995a. *Te Tau o Te Reo Māori*. Wellington: Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori.
- . 1995b. *Āe rānei, he taonga tuku iho? National Māori Language Survey 1995: Provisional findings*. Wellington: Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori.
- . 1996. *Toitū Te Reo: Draft consultation document about the Māori language*. Wellington: Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori.
- Walker, Ranginui J. 1987. *Nga Tau Tohetohe: Years of anger*, ed. Jacqueline Amoamo. Auckland: Penguin Books.
- Winiata, Pakake Calm, and Whatarangi Winiata. 1995. Whare Wananga development in 1993–1994. *New Zealand Annual Review of Education* 4: 137–59.