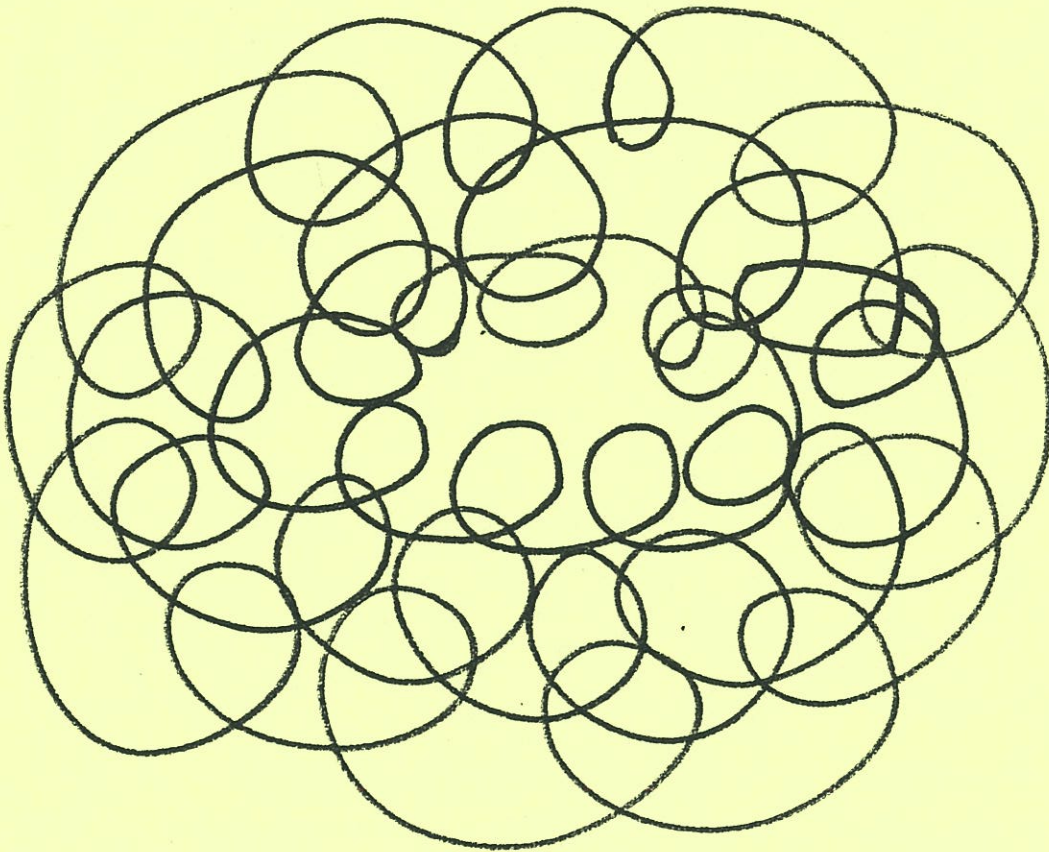


TE KOHANGA REO

- A SALVAGE PROGRAMME FOR THE MAORI LANGUAGE



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The future of Maori as a first language in New Zealand is imperilled. Most native speakers are over 40 years of age and in many tribal areas there are only a handful of native speakers who are under 40. Despite 10 years of Maori language promotion in secondary schools and universities, few people leave the school system with a fluent competence in Maori, unless they are already native speakers. Surveys in the 1970s indicated that, although there were over 70,000 Maori speakers, less than one percent of Maori five year olds entering schools are native speakers.

In 1982 an ambitious programme to establish Maori-medium preschool centres (language nests) was launched by the Department of Maori Affairs. To date, 30 such centres have been established and they cater for 600 preschool Maori children. But there are in excess of 30,000 Maori children under five, and for the salvage programme to be successful much more human and financial resources must be committed.

This paper looks at the philosophy behind the programme and the difficulties that its first two years have encountered.

LANGUAGE POLICY

The Maori language, once the first language of New Zealand, has been relegated to a minor position in official terms since the beginning of organised European settlement 140 years ago. There are a number of dialectal differences amongst the various tribes, but unlike Western Australia, or other countries of British overseas settlement, the indigenous Maori spoke a language that was universal to the whole country. When this was transcribed by missionary-scholars, and the bible, then other written works began to be produced in Maori, a standard linguistic orthography was produced. From the late 1830s onwards, Maori communities eagerly accepted Christianity and mission-led schooling, so that by 1870 most Maori were literate in their own language and many were also literate in English.

About 100 years ago, when the colonial government accepted responsibility for Maori village schools, the medium of instruction in these schools became English, while Maori as a language of communication in schools was disfavoured and later suppressed. Many older Maori people recall being beaten for speaking Maori at school as recently as the 1930s and 1940s. Maori is a language unique to New Zealand, although its close relationship to Tahitian, Rapanui, and other island Polynesian languages is recognised. If Maori is to survive as a living language, it must do so in New Zealand, so the responsibility for its future rests with New Zealanders.

WHO SPEAKS MAORI IN NEW ZEALAND?

In short, only adult Maori. From 1973-78 a survey of language use in Maori households and communities was conducted by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, under the direction of Dr Richard Benton. Benton's reports indicate that:

1. Maori is spoken by a majority of Maori people over the age of about 30 in North Auckland, parts of the Bay of Plenty, the East Coast of the North Island, and some other parts of the country.
2. Most Maori people over 50 in most parts of the North Island.
3. A few young people and children in some places.

4. Most children and younger people in a very small number of rural areas (Benton, 1979, 11).
5. Very few non-Maori (Pakeha) are known to be fluent speakers of Maori - certainly less than 500 and probably less than 200.

Extrapolating to the Maori population as a whole, Benton suggests that about 20-25 percent of Maori (70,000) are able to speak the language conversationally and a further 25-30 percent (115,000) were able to understand the language easily (Benton, 1979, 11). Because these data are based on a survey that began in 1973 and was completed in 1978, between 5 and 10 years has elapsed, and the number of fluent Maori speakers has continued to decline. Our own observations indicate that the stock of fluent Maori speakers is being depleted at an alarming rate, although the secondary school system expands its contribution to Maori language learning, especially amongst young Maori pupils. In the last decade, the number of pupils studying Maori at secondary schools increased from 3,000 to 14,000, and now elements of Maori culture are a necessary part of teacher training in all teachers' colleges. Indeed, the Department of Education has established five bilingual primary schools (Douglas, 1979).

Despite the apparently rich linguistic resource still available, it is important to recognise that Maori is very much a minority language and culture in an overwhelmingly monolingual and monocultural Anglo-Celtic society. Maori is the language of the disadvantaged and the oppressed and must compete with English, the only official language and the mother tongue of the dominant culture. Many people in New Zealand believe that there is a renaissance of Maori culture under way at present. Notwithstanding this, the future survival of the language is far from assured.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR MAORI LANGUAGE LEARNING

On paper, the resources committed to the learning of Maori seem extensive. At all levels of the formal education system, some inputs of Maori language are evident. All universities have Maori language courses, some polytechnics and community colleges offer courses too. At Wellington Polytechnic, intensive six-week Maori language courses for beginners have proved to be very popular, especially for public servants who can get study leave to pursue these courses. At secondary level, most schools offer Maori language as an optional language programme, which can be studied and examined to School Certificate, University Entrance and Scholarship level. Unfortunately, most pupils studying Maori are themselves Maori and do not proceed beyond their second or third year, leaving school with only rudiments of the language and unable to comprehend most conversations in Maori.

At primary school level, besides the five bilingual schools, there are itinerant teachers of Maori and advisers in Maori education who assist teachers in schools to develop programmes in aspects of Maori language and culture.

At preschool level, Maori language resources have been downgraded or ignored until very recently. Working on the assumption that Maori children must be prepared for life in a Pakeha world, the preschool systems have almost totally neglected the language resources of Maori parents and grandparents in their communities. We must note, however, that the majority of Maori parents associated with preschools and primary schools are monolingual English speakers themselves, and are embarrassed, both by their own lack of competence in the Maori language, and their lack of sophistication in the language and culture of the school system.

At adult learning level, a national network of classes and learning groups has

been established to teach Maori to adults, again mostly Maori, but also to an increasing number of Pakeha. These groups learn by what has become known as the 'rakau method', which uses mime, gesture and body language and the serial introduction of vocabulary, concepts, comparison and then grammar. Groups meet in all sorts of different places, on marae, in factories, in halls, homes, schools, and now Maori language preschools - Nga Kohanga Reo.

In formal schooling systems, most teachers are Pakeha. They may have goodwill towards the survival and development of the Maori language, but little real commitment to it. In the community at large, the most common belief is that Maori language survival is appropriate, but it is up to the Maori themselves to ensure this. Few people have any idea of the pervasiveness of English in New Zealand life. English to them is their language of communication; until a few decades ago, non-English speakers would be berated for speaking in public such as on buses, in their own language. New Zealand Pakeha were obsessed with the notion of assimilation. Only recently has the concept of multi-culturalism or pluralism been accepted, but few people appear to be willing to commit public resources to the development of minority languages and cultures. To the majority of Pakeha New Zealanders, such enterprise is outside the realm of the public purse, and while it may be allowed to proceed, it should not do so at the expense of 'mainline' education or of the dominant culture.

In broadcasting, the commitment of resources to Maori language programmes is minimal. There are no Maori language programmes on private radio stations, and only limited air-time is made available on Radio New Zealand, or the two public television stations. A five minute per week Maori news programme was started during World War II, and this was expanded in the 1960s to 30 minutes per week. Throughout the 1970s decade, Maori people requested more Maori language and Maori content programmes on radio and television. In 1978 the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand established a Maori and Pacific Islanders' programme unit, Te Reo o Aotearoa, which produces a variety of programmes, ranging from five-minute news broadcasts each day in Maori, to weekly programmes in English and/or Maori about Maori affairs. Maori people saw the expansion of Maori radio broadcasting as too little, too late, and noted with some cynicism that the expansion occurred after radio had been relegated to a minor place in comparison with television. As for television, Maori were always in the news somewhere - usually depicted as 'baddies', but sometimes as 'goodies', trotted out to welcome visiting royalty or other overseas dignitaries, and to bolster out official commitment to a 'multicultural' society. Over the last several years, a magazine programme of Maori interest and content has been produced weekly, but early in 1983 a five-day per week, six-minute duration news broadcast in Maori, was instituted. We feel that this news programme has done more to confirm official recognition of the Maori language, at least in the eyes of Maori people, than all the other official pronouncements about the importance of Maori to the future of New Zealand as a multicultural society. All the same, you will appreciate, this is less than half of one percent of the weekly television offerings and, in more specific terms, accounts for only three percent of news broadcasting time per week.

MAINTAINING MAORI SOCIAL COHESION

There are both social and demographic difficulties in fostering Maori social institutions. Because of a high birthrate, 40 percent of Maori are under 15 years of age; indeed, 60 percent are under 21. There are only a small proportion of Maori in the age cohorts over 45 who make up the vast majority of Maori speakers (46,000 or 12 percent of the Maori population). In arithmetic terms, there are four Maori in the preschool and school-age groups for every Maori aged 45 or over - i.e. one surviving grandparent for every four children. Kaumatua (the venerated elders) number only 12,000 and comprise a mere three percent of the population. Older people are more likely to live in rural areas and small country towns, while three-quarters of Maori children live in the 10

main urban areas of the North Island.

Demographic causes, combined with rapid social change and Westernisation, and a paucity of individual and group financial resources, exacerbate the problems of Maori cultural learning and social development. It goes without saying that Maori education attainment levels are much lower than those of Pakeha, that Maori employment is distributed unevenly at the lower end of the status and rewards scale, and the Maori unemployment is much higher than Pakeha unemployment at all ages, but especially amongst school leavers where unemployment rates for Maori are variously estimated at between 45 and 55% (i.e. more than eight times that of Pakeha school leavers). All these factors are further complicated by widespread intermarriage between Maori and Pakeha, which tends to subordinate the culture of the Maori spouse to that of the Pakeha spouse, and increases their difficulties in Maori cultural transmission.

LANGUAGE AS A POLITICAL OBJECTIVE

Kohanga Reo (language nests) had their intellectual beginnings in the 1960s when Maori university students sought to perpetuate and enhance the still existing practice of grandparents rearing one or more of their grandchildren. At successive Maori students' and young people's conferences, Maori-speaking grandparents were asked to foster, and raise as Maori speakers, one or more of their grandchildren. The aim was to bridge the widening gap between the bilingual Maori-English-speaking older cohorts, and their mono-lingual English-speaking descendants. Early in 1982, the Department of Maori Affairs established a pilot Kohanga Reo in a suburban area of Wellington.

"The Te Kohanga Reo programme is designed to stimulate growth of Maori whanau centres that offer the best child care in an environment of Maoritanga where Maori is the language."

(Department of Maori Affairs, 1982:3)

Three objectives have been identified and stated for the language salvage programme. As their first objective, Kohanga Reo are expected to arrest the decline of Maori-speaking people in New Zealand. This objective is stated in terms of bridging the gap between the bulk of Maori language speakers over 40 and the new generation aged 0-5 years, the foundation of our future. This objective embodies the belief that, if the Maori people are to survive as an identifiable people into the 21st century, then their distinctive language and culture must survive as well.

The second objective of Kohanga Reo is to give Maori people greater control over their own lives, and the ability to plan and organise their own futures within the context of the whanau or extended family system. Such a system still exists in Maori society, although it is under attack from economic and social forces associated with rural-urban migration, high workforce participation rates of both men and women in the wage economy, and the influences of the Western nuclear family system that is all pervasive around them. This second objective is stated in terms of the Department of Maori Affairs Tu Tangata programme - 'the (tall) stance of the people' - which aims to raise Maori self-awareness and self-actualization.

The third objective of the Kohanga Reo programme is to achieve Maori control over Maori resources. Effecting change in the educational system has been difficult and requires much effort. To convince teachers, principals and educational administrators that each Maori child has a right to her/his individuality and therefore a right to expression and education in her/his 'mother tongue', has been an endless task and has met with only limited success. This third objective is stated in terms of Mana Maori Motuhake (the spirit of Maori

autonomy) and can best be described as a desire for Maori themselves to decide what they want for themselves, for Maori to control their children's socialisation and education, and the content and context of that education in the wider New Zealand community perspective. It can be seen from another perspective as a desire to remove the Pakeha right of veto over Maori life and social institutions.

These three objectives are inter-related and self-reinforcing. Taken together they strongly denounce the majority culture's preferred future of racial and cultural amalgamation (assimilation). At the same time, these objectives do not reject a joint future, but emphasise a future based on recognition of the equality of different cultures.

With these objectives in mind, the strategy is to provide a Maori language and social environment which will produce bilingual (Maori-English) children at the age of five years, and at the same time, to ensure that the standard of child-care and preschool education is as good as that provided in English language preschools. Only in this way will Maori parents have a genuine choice. The Maori Affairs Department's plans are based on a supposed birth cohort of 6,500 per year since 1976, but these are conservative estimates. According to the 1981 census figures, where ethnic self-identification is more likely than at birth registration, there were 35,830 enumerated as Maori and 18,860 others who were enumerated as being of Maori descent - a total of 54,690 (i.e. 21.5 percent of all children under 5). Each birth cohort on these revised figures is 7,100 on the narrower definition of Maori, and 11,000 on the broader definition of Maori (Department of Statistics, 1981:16).

The Kohanga Reo programme therefore aims to engulf every newborn Maori baby, i.e. about 6,500 per year, and to try to gather up now the 20,000 under 3 years old.

(Department of Maori Affairs, 1982:5)

On revised figures, these aims should be to engulf between 7,200 and 11,000 newborn Maori babies per year, and to gather up the 22,000 - 33,000 under three years old now (depending on the definition of Maori used).

IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME

Although promoted by the Department of Maori Affairs, the Kohanga Reo programme draws heavily on Maori community resources for its implementation. The first pilot centre was established with greater monetary input from Government than subsequent ones. Besides the Maori language speakers, the Kohanga Reo draw upon Maori communities for buildings, finance, equipment, social and spiritual support, and upon Pakeha for tolerance and goodwill. From national resources they draw establishment and continuing financial assistance. Inputs from the Department of Social Welfare (whose responsibility covers child-care centres and creches), the Department of Education (which is responsible for kindergartens and the supervision of educational programmes in play centres), and the Department of Labour (which provides wage subsidies for job creation programmes), have been crucial in most Kohanga Reo.

There is little doubt that the Department of Maori Affairs entered the area of child-care and child development through Kohanga Reo because Maori are dissatisfied with the extent of Maori in the education system. Despite an increased emphasis on Maori in schools, the Department of Education has moved very slowly indeed in establishing either bilingual schools or Maori-medium streams in otherwise English language schools. The biggest problem rests with their

teachers. Overwhelmingly, they are incapable of mounting a bilingual Maori-English programme and feel threatened by the prospect of it. (There are more New Zealand teachers who are bilingual in French and English than in Maori and English and there may well be more teachers in New Zealand who would argue strongly for bilingual education in New Zealand provided it was in useful languages such as English and French, Spanish, Japanese or German). This is a serious problem and one which the Department of Education will have to face as children from Kohanga Reo reach school age with a bilingual competence that will need to be nurtured through the primary and secondary schools.

Kohanga Reo are now established and working in many parts of New Zealand. By the end of 1982, more than 30 were established, and many others planned. The original objective was a Kohanga Reo in every community where there is a demand for language maintenance - at least 500 such centres envisaged - but reaching this objective within three years, as originally hoped, now seems unlikely. Many communities have yet to be convinced, and want to see the efficacy of the existing centres before committing their children and their resources to the programme. At national level, the Department of Maori Affairs has established a Kohanga Reo Advisory Board, with district liaison staff to be appointed in each of the nine land districts. These liaison staff will act to co-ordinate Kohanga Reo activities, provide staff training and other forms of assistance and encourage the establishment of further centres. They will be full-time officers of the Maori Affairs community and cultural development section.

Wherever Kohanga Reo have been established, they have asserted Maori control, and because so few Pakeha people have Maori language competence, the centrality of Maori language learning has helped to keep control in Maori hands. Kindergartens and play centres have responded cautiously but favourably to their establishment, by asking preschool advisers in the Department of Education to help them expand the Maori content of their own programmes. With the long-term prospect of one-fifth of the country's preschoolers choosing between Kohanga Reo or existing preschool alternatives, some kindergarten teachers and play centre supervisors want to offer attractive programmes that will compete for the Maori parents and their preschool child.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED:

Establishing a language salvage programme such as this has not been an easy task. There have been a myriad of problems encountered, which can be subsumed under two main categories - philosophical problems and sociological problems. We wish to consider some of these now, and in doing so, we actively seek solutions to them, by making them part of the public debate.

SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

The first of these problems is that communities often consider a Kohanga Reo to be a good idea, but lack confidence in themselves to implement such a programme. The very establishment of such a centre is a major innovation for many communities, and a challenge for them that is often very daunting. For further Kohanga Reo to get off the ground, ordinary people need to convince themselves that they are capable - not extraordinary - just capable of carrying it through. The more familiar the structure and organisation of the Kohanga Reo to existing social institutions in their own lives, the easier it will be for such people to rise above their poor self-image. In existing Kohanga Reo, those tasks that are most familiar to the participants are the easiest done: fundraising and catering are good examples of this.

The number and ages of children has proven to be a major problem in many centres. Centres range in size from 10 children to 25 or 30, depending on available buildings, demand for places and staffing. One of the most promising centres, in suburban Auckland, has 25 children, of whom 12 are under 18 months, four are three-years-old and the remainder are four or five years old. A wide range of ages implies a range in ability, and a range in appropriate programmes, which means specialised activities tailored to the motor skills and cognitive skills of the children. Presumably this wide age range will disappear as more centres are established, and the backlog of three and four year olds, whose parents want them to attend Kohanga Reo, pass on to primary school.

Associated with age differentials are differences in language skills. Ideally the programme aims to attract babies and young infants who will be exposed to a Maori language environment daily for four to five years. Even where this is achieved, there will still be considerable differences between children who come from homes where there is little or no Maori spoken, and those who come from Maori-speaking or bilingual homes.

It is assumed that by age 5, children will leave Kohanga Reo with fluency in both English and Maori. Contact with English-speaking parents, television and neighbours is expected to provide sufficient exposure to English for the children to be well able to cope with the English language environment of the primary school. The task of the Kohanga Reo is to provide sufficient exposure to Maori to ensure that the child will gain equal facility in Maori. Most centres expect parents to reinforce at home the Maori that children hear at Kohanga Reo. To increase the level of communication between parents and children in both languages, every Kohanga Reo has part-time Maori language classes for parents. Most parents are keen to become bilingual themselves, and by attending these classes, raise their own levels of Maori language fluency. Concern has been expressed that if this trend continues, some of the children will get little exposure to English at home and their planned bilingualism will be supplanted by monolingual Maori. Most of the advocates of Kohanga Reo do not see this as a disadvantage for the child, but rather as a positive response to the underlying objective of ensuring the survival of Maori.

Because the programme expects four or more years of commitment by parents, there is the continued problem of flagging interest and commitment from them. Attendance costs are high in most full-time centres (\$40-\$60 per week) and working mothers appear to be the most committed parents. Working mothers who need day-care facilities in order to keep their jobs are not only the section of the community which is likely to be most supportive, but also they are the most likely to support the whanau (extended family) concept of the centre, where parental roles are shared by 'mothers, fathers and grandparents'. They are also the parents least likely to be critical of the Kohanga Reo programmes, because of the shortage of alternative day care.

Finding and keeping suitable staff at Kohanga Reo is another difficulty encountered by many centres. The Department of Maori Affairs originally stipulated that the supervisors and their assistants should be paid adequate wages to ensure a commitment from them. They should be native Maori speakers, over 35 years of age, and have grown up in a Maori communal environment. Not only are these staff expected to provide language resources for the centre, but they are also expected to be role models of 'traditional' Maori family life which the programme seeks to maintain and enhance in the community at large. Many of the most suitable people from a role model standpoint are weak in Maori language and vice versa. Besides these qualities, parents expect that their children will be challenged by the environment in which they are placed, so a background in developmental play is considered essent-

ial for the staffing of a Kohanga Reo. The smaller centres, with 10 or 12 children, are the least successful because the staff in them have to be all things to the children and cannot specialise so easily to maximise their respective strengths. Many of the staff appointed are finding child-care to be a demanding commitment because they are too old, or in poor health. Again the size of the centre seems to be crucial here; the larger centres draw upon a wider range of people and can better match available human resources to the variety of tasks needing attention.

PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

One of the main philosophical difficulties encountered by Kohanga Reo has been defining the objectives of the programme and implementing them in a variety of different communities. After the pilot scheme got under way, a small team of women travelled throughout the country meeting Maori communities and explaining the philosophy of the Kohanga Reo. They emphasised different aspects of the programme at different times and places, mainly because the transmission of knowledge was oral/aural rather than written, and their presentation to communities included a lot of responses to individual questions. Part of the strategy of the programme is to emphasise its Maoriness, and to maintain political control of it, much of the discussion was in Maori. For the same reason, little has been written down in either English or Maori, because to many Maori people, the written word is treated as static and unalterable.

Unfortunately, while communication in Maori society is still largely based on face-to-face verbal exchanges, it is not efficient over large numbers of people, and messages suffer transformations as they are repeated. The overall objective is to save the Maori language by re-creating an environment where those who speak the language will transmit it to young children so that it will become their mother tongue. To get this objective accepted by parents, who are themselves monolingual English speaking, it is necessary to offer their children a child-care environment which can compete more than favourably with existing English language alternatives. So far the most enthusiastic parents have been urban, better-educated in terms of formal schooling, and who might pass for 'middle-class' within a class-based model of New Zealand society. Although strongly influenced by Western (Pakeha) values, these people have a strong emotional commitment to their 'Maoriness' and are more able to reason their need to maintain a Maori identity within New Zealand society. Their very sophistication with Pakeha cultural values also means that they have clearer and more critical views of the Kohanga Reo programme objectives and higher expectations of what it should do for themselves and their children.

"It is envisaged that the Te Kohanga Reo programme will operate using the same basic principles for child care and growth at present adopted by the best pre-school, kindergarten and play centre organisations. The difference will be the use of Maori language as the only means of verbal communication in the centre and the fact that it is a whanau operation in the true Maori way."
(Department of Maori Affairs, 1982:8)

There is no reason why this should not happen. Maori involvement in the play centre movement in New Zealand has been quite extensive since about 1960. Indeed, many Maori women who were play centre supervisors and activists in the 1960s participated in a Van Leer Foundation/University of Sydney

programme for aboriginal families in New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. There is a considerable store of play centre trained Maori women, who not only recognise the importance of play for child growth and development, but have been active promoters of this philosophy in New Zealand and Australia. What is more, most of these women are bilingual.

There may be a transitional problem, due to the paucity of preschool experience amongst the people who conceived, and are promoting the scheme. The main advocates in the Department of Maori Affairs have had primary teacher training or social work training, and are not as sensitised as they might be to the differences in preschool and infant school learning modes.

SOLUTIONS

There are no clear-cut simple solutions to the problems encountered in this language salvage programme, other than those solutions that arise from experience, trial and error, and communicating difficulties, and solutions, between the various parties involved. The programme is seriously under-funded. Soon people will ask why they must pay \$40-\$60 per week to ensure that their child has the right to preschool education in their mother tongue, when their Pakeha neighbours receive the same, or better, education in their mother tongue for \$2 per week. The glib answer is that the choice is the parents' own. 'If you choose to send your child to Kohanga Reo, then you will have to pay for that privilege, but the choice is yours.' And that really sums up the power of the dominant culture to restrict choices for the indigenous minority.

Finally, what we see as one of the most exciting aspects of the Kohanga Reo programme is its claim for indigenous autonomy; for the right of Maori people to control their own lives, according to their values, and to co-exist in harmony with these values, reinforced by an enhanced self-worth. Perhaps in the long run, the problems outlined above and any others, contain the seeds of their own resolution because the problems encountered are generated by the desire to stand tall and be proud to assert one's Maoriness, in a predominantly Anglo-Celtic society.

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