

Minutes of Discussion
Early Childhood Career Education
Forum Dec '85

CHALLENGES IN THE FUTURE

DONNA AWATERE

E te Minita, tena koe Russell; nga rangitira matauranga, tena koutou. E aku hoa, e aku whanau, e aku rangitira ma; tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.

I am very proud and privileged to be one of the disagreeable women on this panel. And I want to follow on from several remarks my colleagues have made about the fact that here we are again after 15 years. I do recall being one of the early raging feminists fighting in factories - in fact, being tossed out of Egg Distributors in Auckland because we dared to suggest women should get equal pay, and that factories and industries should provide childcare for women and their children. It seems like a long time ago, but I'll never forget as a young girl being splattered with eggs and being beaten up by a woman who disagreed with what we're on about.

We're still disagreeable, if somewhat respectable.

I want to continue that theme by moving away from the discussions which you have both opened and moving back into something which John Bennett, began this morning: the Kohanga Reo movement. I wish to travel down a philosophical road - please bear with me - which I feel is the root of the fundamental differences between what is happening in the Kohanga Reo movement and what is happening in the rest of pre-school education.

An essential difference between Maori culture and Pakeha culture, is that we still, in spite of Pakeha influence, take a holistic view of life. In this view, life is like an interwoven mat with complex patterns in which each aspect is so tightly bound to the other that they are not able to be separated out for individual

analysis. Life is seen to be multi-dimensional, a prism with spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical, family, hapu and tribal sides, in which early childhood care and education is one of many strands linked with other strands of life such as employment, housing, health, justice, etc.

I bring this up because this must be at least the tenth conference I've attended this year to do with health, employment broadcasting, education, housing or other issues which affect us. It seems to me that Pakehas fragment life into separate components and never the twain shall meet. It seems that we Maoris are always here, the same faces, and only the faces of the Pakeha move, and that the questions and the answers are the same. I wish that you would get your mosaic together - however messy and muddled it might be - so that we can speak to one another as holistic mosaics rather than fragmented prisms - whatever.

The bottom-line similarity in all the questions Maoridom is confronting and the one that gives our people so much difficulty is the one began 145 years ago: 'Who has the resources of this nation, and who controls them, according to what values?' The Kohanga Reo arose out of the fact that our culture, our values, our language and our very being have been excluded from Pakeha institutions like education, pre-school education, health, broadcasting, social welfare, justice and others, with the result of cultural alienation and cultural demise.

The bottom-line difference between the Kohanga Reo movement and all the others - childcare, playcentre, kindergarten movements is a cultural one. It is more than just the language. Culture is about the ability of people to live their lives according to their own cultural rules - to be self-reliant and independent. This ability over the past 145 years our people have lost.

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Kohanga Reo is the first significant and successful post-1900 step into a world based on the re-linking and the unifying of the whanau-based Maori cultural values, based on tribal and hapu cultural values and not on those of the Pakeha.

The Kohanga Reo is about reconnection, not disconnection. The best Kohanga Reo are those where the extended whanau, the kuia and koroua of the area come in to manaaki and awhina our children. As the figures suggest, the average Te Kohanga Reo has 10 helpers to every 15 children and only three of these are paid, two under temporary work schemes. In kindies and childcare, the focus is on trained staff. In playcentre, the focus is on mothers. In Te Kohanga Reo, the focus is on the whole whanau, the entire hapu, the entire iwi, the entire community.

Unlike some places, the Kohanga Reo is not a place of business, nor is it just for the reo. The kaupapa is the survival of a culture. No other pre-school movement bears that burden. English won't die if all childcare, kindies and playcentres close down. Your culture will survive. Not so for us Maori. This is why when twice as many Maori mothers are in the lowest income bracket as Pakeha and this year's grant gives out \$604 for each kindy child and \$335 for each TKR child, we still keep going. That's just begun this year. Before that, we'd be lucky if each TKR child got \$50.

Te Kohanga Reo is about cultural commitment. It is not about childcare. It is about family, whanau, hapu and iwi care. A challenge for everyone here is to become aware that the Kohanga Reo is the perfect model for the entire pre-school movements. Our future, the future of all of us, lies in bilingualism and the ability of everyone, not just Maori, to communicate in Maori and, more importantly, to communicate in the Maori universe.

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Industrialisation has fragmented the family, weakened the links. The Kohanga Reo strengthens those bonds in the community. Kohanga Reo is based on the abilities and strengths of ordinary people, not trained people, not professionals, but on wisdom and lived experience. Since the colonial days up until now there has only been one universe in Aotearoa. This has caused all sorts of social trauma for our people; trauma reflected in devastating statistics which you are all familiar with: the second highest imprisonment rate in the world - in fact, it costs \$40 million to keep 2,000 of our people in goal for a year; the highest death rates in the world from heart disease and lung cancer; our suicide rates up six-fold; highest adolescent pregnancy rate in the world; lower literacy rate; alcoholism three times the white rate; and so on.

When we consider the cultural genius of our people as seen in the oral tradition, in whakapapa, in moateatea, in reading nature and the cosmos; when we consider the successful Maori trading, agricultural and business ventures of the early colonial years; when we consider that more Maoris proportionately then could read and write than Pakehas and in two languages; and when we reflect upon today's situation with our people, then we must ask what happened to our people. The resources and who controls them, who says what is to be valued, who says how those values are to be upheld, that is what happened. Our people lost the ability to determine our own destiny.

The Kohanga Reo, for our children - for the 6,00 already there and for those who will go through - represents a step in the way to once again determine our own destiny. At the end of my book on Maori Sovereignty I said: "It is the right of all people to dream dreams for themselves, believe in them and make them a reality."

To reclaim the reality of our tipuna, to take the first step towards Maori sovereignty, this is the step the Kohanga Reo has taken. Out of the world of the darkness of the Pakeha and into the world of light with our tipuna.

We have been accused of separatism, but we can liken what has happened with the Kohanga Reo and what is happening in employment moves and other moves in Maoridom to the separation between Ranganui and Papatuanuku. They had to separate so that their children could live. Integration and assimilation have suffocated us. To survive, we have to leave you.

The challenge for our people is to move the Kohanga Reo steps into new frontiers of economics, health and justice: to push forward into our own schools; to plug more fully into the media in Maori; and to extend outwards the boundaries of a restrictive, individualistic and jealous Pakeha culture.

The challenge for Pakeha people in early childhood care and education, as it is in any other sphere, is to confront your own identity; to see yourselves as one with your own tipuna and to see that in this place, Aotearoa, there is no identity that is not based here with us, the Maori. Whakapapa is the one true identity and it is not about being able to trace yourself back six generations either. Who are you? - that is the key question. Until you have the strength to confront that question, I believe you as a Pakeha people will never allow us to have equity. We can look at the way the education budget gets spent, we can ask why education gets such a small slice; we can look at the Maori slice and say "How Victorian; how racist or how very male" but, whichever, it still gets dispensed along Pakeha values.

What are they, and who are you?

When white people really understand who we the Maori are, what we are on about, education and every other system will be redesigned according to our culture and to our values. Maybe a synthesis between ours and yours may bring some form of sanity into the way money is made and spent, and decrease our appalling social statistics. This is the challenge for the future.