

COMMENTARY: DETERRITORIALISING GEOPOLITICAL SPACES AND CHALLENGING NEOLIBERAL CONDITIONS THROUGH LANGUAGE REVERNACULARISATION IN KŌHANGA REO

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Abstract

This article explores some of the influences shaping early childhood Māori language education in Aotearoa New Zealand. By drawing on Garcia's socio-historical stages of language orientation it parallels Māori language socio-historical developments and the linguistic conditions within which Māori language regeneration efforts reside. Also drawing on Waitangi Tribunal findings these are juxtaposed as developments in Māori language education. In the New Zealand context, public policy has been slow to keep up with the pace of change, much less support or work with these flax-roots movements. Referred to as "leaden-footed", the slow pace of Crown response and responsibility has stymied advancements. The difficulties associated with these movements are typically politically constructed problems, not linguistic. Controversy exists where there is misinformation about the nature of languages and what constitutes bilingual education. In the New Zealand context, education (spanning both the non-compulsory and compulsory sectors) has been dominated by monolingual English policies and practices. Debate still rages about whether Māori, one of the two official written and spoken languages, should be compulsory in schools. It is argued here that it should.

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Socio-historical stages of language orientation

Garcia's (2009) main thesis is that bilingual education is *the only way* to educate children in the 21st century. It is inclusive in its pluralistic visions and reconceptualising understandings about language and bilingualism. It transforms the lives of children and adults throughout the world. She argues that socio-historical positioning, geopolitical forces and language ideologies all interact to sustain different kinds of bilingual education policies (and different educational options and practices) in different places throughout the world.

Heritage language revitalisation and education has the added goal of not only creating bilingual children as an outcome, but saving or revernacularising language. Therefore, as Garcia (2009) argues, what continues to separate two kinds of programme goals has to do with the broader general goal of bilingual education—the use of two languages to educate generally, meaningfully, equitably, and for tolerance and appreciation of diversity—as distinguished from the narrower goal in general education of second- or foreign-language teaching an additional language as a subject or for assimilatory purposes. That is an important distinction. For indigenous children their indigenous language/s should be neither thought of as an inhibitor of education, a deficit, a second language, nor a foreign language but a birth-right, a resource, a taonga.

In the context of Māori language education it is argued that te reo Māori is the terralingua of Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori interests in the language are not the same as the interests of any other minority group in New Zealand society in its own language (Waitangi Tribunal,

2010). Figure 1 overviews how Māori language has been seen as a “problem” to be “done away with” in the early colonial encounter space; to language as a right in the latter half of the 20th century, and decolonising frameworks in more recent years. These are positioned alongside positivistic/technicist approaches to language in education, postmodern times of language minorities having agency, and the impacts of globalisation.

The politics of kōhanga reo (Māori language nests)

The article titled “The Rise and Decline of Te Kōhanga Reo: The Impact of Government Policy” (Skerrett-White, 2001) overviews the rapid expansion of the kōhanga reo movement within its first 10 years of establishment and its attrition over the next decade. It was concluded that the Government's “hands off” approach to advancing kaupapa Māori initiatives ostensibly amounted to little more than institutionalised racism, perpetuating disadvantage. The Wai 262 (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010) documents further decline; that since 1993 the proportion of Māori children in early childhood education attending kōhanga reo has dropped from just under half to under a quarter. At school, the proportion of Māori children participating in Māori-medium education has also dropped. It argues that if the peak proportions of the 1990s had been maintained there would today be 9,600 more Māori children attending kōhanga reo and an extra 5,700 Māori school children learning via the medium of te reo. The report finds that te reo Māori is approaching a crisis point (p. x) and that overall the language is in worrying decline because diminishing

	Socio-historical stages of language orientation	Māori language historical perspectives
Stage I	<p>Language as a problem <i>Positivist/technicist approaches to language in education</i> <i>Modernist framework</i></p> <p>One nation one language ideology. Nation state facilitates urbanisation, secularisation and citizen transformation from a traditional to a modern disposition. Urban development in the 19th century (which spread with colonisation) meant that languages became modern; that is, languages which symbolised national identity were standardised, codified, and used in schools, to the exclusion of “other” languages, especially after World Wars I & II. Nations within a state whose language did not coincide with the one elevated to privileged status became a “concern”.</p> <p>A period of linguistic assimilation/annihilation.</p>	<p>Māori language viewed as a problem <i>Linguistically assimilating Māori—Towards English monolingualism</i> <i>Subtractive language policies in schools</i></p> <p>1900–1925: Māori children generally monolingual Māori-speaking but put into English language programmes (schools) which aimed to subtract their Māori language (often violently). 1925–1950: A period where Māori children were bilingual English/Māori-speaking (BEMS) but Māori language largely replaced by English as their first language.</p> <p>The new generation of parents was convinced that their children had to speak English to get ahead, and thus a whole generation grew up who either knew no Māori or knew so little that they were “unable to use it effectively and with dignity” (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010, p. 17). 1950–1975: Accelerated English language monolingualism in early childhood education (ECE) and schools (modernisation/urbanisation). Māori language seen as a problem and likewise Māori children.</p>
Stage II	<p>Language as a right <i>Critical/postmodern approaches to language in education</i></p> <p>In 1970s and 1980s structuralist modernist policies called into question and role of socio-historical processes (e.g., class, ethnicity, race, language and gender) in shaping particular forms of bilingual education given increased attention. Some forms of bilingual education criticised as language minorities claimed their language rights and developed their own forms of bilingual education.</p> <p>Language difference seen more as a right which had to be negotiated.</p> <p>Language minorities started gaining agency in shaping their own language policies and practice in the education of their children.</p>	<p>Māori sovereignty—Rights based <i>Critical/postcolonial approaches to language in education</i></p> <p>In 1970s and 1980s the total domination of English-language mass media also acted as an “incessant barrage that almost blasted the Māori language into oblivion” (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010, p. 17). Research showed the number of pre-school children who could speak Māori fluently was “almost certainly less than a hundred” (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010, p. 17). Taha Māori programmes criticised Māori facing language death and move into revitalisation mode.</p> <p>First bilingual school—Ruatoki—officially sanctioned.</p> <p>1982 onwards: The grassroots movement of the Kōhanga Reo movement began—exponential growth leading to the advancement of kaupapa Māori education through Kura Kaupapa Māori and the whole stream of Māori education.</p>

(continued)

Socio-historical stages of language orientation	Māori language historical perspectives
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Stage II (cont.)</p>	<p>Lobbying for Treaty of Waitangi ratification. Waitangi Tribunal established and given retrospective powers (1985) with Treaty Principles defined in what has come to be known as the landmark Lands Case (1987). Māori language gains official status (1987).</p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Stage III</p> <p>Language as a resource <i>Ecological frameworks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21st century challenge of the sovereignty of states. • Globalisation—greater movement of peoples and increasing awareness of other languages and the dominance of some languages. • UNESCO proposed three basic guiding principles (no longer simply focused on mother tongue as in 1950s, but on intercultural education as a resource for all children): <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Mother tongue instruction</i> as a means of improving educational quality by building upon the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers; 2. <i>Bilingual and/or multilingual education</i> at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies; 3. Language as an essential component of <i>inter-cultural education</i> in order to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights. 	<p>Māori English bilingualism for all <i>Tino rangatiratanga and decolonisation frameworks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth of a full stream of Māori-medium education from Kōhanga Reo to Wharekura, once an indigenous movement now co-opted by the State and Kōhanga Reo takes a claim under urgency to the Waitangi Tribunal. • New Zealand signs up to the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples yet to be ratified. • Changes in legislation around Graduating Teacher Standards and Registered Teaching Criteria (NZTC). • Further political lobbying for te reo—promoting additive bilingualism and BEMS. • Development of a Māori Education Strategy (<i>Ka Hikitia</i>, Ministry of Education) and linked <i>Ngā Tataiako</i> cultural competencies for teachers of Māori learners (Ministry of Education). • Development of a Māori language strategy (Te Puni Kōkiri). • Decolonisation frameworks not led to self-determination and sovereignty as they are co-opted by the Nation State. • Continued decline of the Kōhanga Reo with implications for Māori educational stream and urgent research needed. • Teacher education for Māori-medium sector unsatisfactory. • Resourcing for Māori-medium sector substandard. • Waitangi Tribunal (Wai 262) highlights need for working on different models of bilingual education for te reo Māori. • In spite of increased use of Māori language in media, Māori language still threatened; its official status meaningless.

FIGURE 1 Three socio-historical stages of language orientation globally and te reo Māori locally.

proportions of younger speakers means that the older native speakers passing away are simply not being replaced.

Policy failures, one of the most notable being the lack of teacher supply to meet the demands has meant the revitalisation efforts since the 1970s have been carried by Māori community efforts. The Tribunal argues that the reo “movement” has been “... weakened more by the governmental failure to give it adequate oxygen and support than by any Māori rejection of their language” (p. xi). That teacher supply is still the issue is nothing new.

Over 40 years ago, in the late 1960s, Professor Byron Bender from Hawai’i was commissioned by the New Zealand Council of Educational Research to conduct a research and development programme related to the language development of Māori children. Bender (1971) made recommendations for initial teacher education stating that progress with language “problems” in education will not be achieved by the efforts of a few supposed experts attempting to influence a mainstream of poorly informed lay opinion, “... but by teachers keeping reasonably abreast of current developments in language study, and in turn making for a generally enlightened public” (p. 12). Bender documented the ways in which the school system prejudiced Māori children with ignorant teachers who needed to have some knowledge of colloquial Māori, noting such knowledge

would also swell the ranks of the candidates for linguistic security and advancement; those taking pride in the genius of their mother tongue ... But most important, the teacher who comes to see that the non-standard English of his pupil is equally as logical, and statistically more often well-formed, than the speech of the middle-class student, would be hard put to fault the basic intelligence of the non-standard [Māori] speaker on linguistic grounds, and be more open to pedagogical experimentation in an effort to ensure his [Māori] academic success at every turn. (p. 51)

Such recommendations included making reading and writing in Māori an option in all primary schools and that the methodology of modern foreign language teaching be incorporated into the training of all primary-school teachers to foster the bilingual abilities of bilingual English/Māori-speaking (BEMS) children. Over 40 years ago Bender argued that these recommendations

lie at the heart of a programme designed to ensure that the child who is stronger in Maori than English when he begins school, will be able to continue his normal linguistic development in Maori, learning to read and write in that language first, and that he will gain a basic oral command of English before learning to read and write it. The aim is the production of strong bilinguals, skilful purveyors of words, who will be equally secure in both languages. (p. 60)

Bender stressed the importance of early years language learning and pointed out that the “child who comes to school is already in possession of an extremely complex set of linguistic rules—more complex than any linguist is now able to describe” (p. 44); in the same way that early childhood is described by Donaldson, Grieve and Pratt in *Te Whāriki* (cited in Ministry of Education, 1996) as

a period of momentous significance for all people growing up in [our] culture ... By the time this period is over, children will have formed conceptions of themselves as social beings, as thinkers, and as language users, and they will have reached certain important decisions about their own abilities and their own worth. (p. 4)

Bender’s recommendations apply equally to the early years sector as they do to the compulsory sector, made evident in Recommendation 5: That the schools take steps to introduce modern grammar and scientific information about

language at all levels in the curriculum. That recommendation included the qualification that

what is desired in the preceding recommendation is not teachers whose training includes a new how-to-do-it component in language teaching methodology and who proceed to apply it mechanically and uncreatively, but rather individuals who are up-to-date in their understanding of the nature of language, and who know the underlying rationale for the methods they are following and creatively contributing to. (p. 60)

The final two recommendations included taking steps to enhance the status and prestige of colloquial Māori and that the language teaching potential of modern mass media, especially television, is not overlooked. This brings into sharp relief the Wai 262 Report claims, over 40 years later, that the bureaucracy's efforts to put in place measures to deal with and encourage the Māori language renaissance have been "decidedly leaden-footed" (Waitangi Tribunal, 2010, p. 58) and that the explosion in the numbers attending kōhanga reo in the early 1980s should have instantly signalled supply and demand issues. Failure to meet the Māori language demands of BEMS children has accounted for the eventual decline in student numbers and not the failure of the Māori language movement.

Current policy—Forward momentum or backward steps?

The dais upon which *Ka Hikitia—Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008–2012* stands is the Ministry of Education's approach to improving the performance of the education system for and with Māori. It is about systemic change in order to make a difference for Māori; not Māori lifting their performance as is so often espoused. That is an important distinction. It means that at long last there is a policy document that is directed more

towards policymakers and teachers rather than whānau Māori. Through systemic transformation hopefully one of the key platform levers of "Increasing whānau and iwi authority and involvement in education" will be enhanced. However, systemic track records do not read well. Aside from the traditional models of education for millennia, what has been demonstrated so far is that Māori were relatively recently galvanized into action through the flaxroots movement of Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori in the 1980s and early 1990s but that has since waned. The *Ka Hikitia—Managing for Success* summary document states that the key to realising Māori education potential is ako. Key aspects of ako are that language, identity and culture count. It is about knowing where students come from and building on what they bring with them; and productive partnerships, which is about Māori students, whānau, iwi and educators working together to produce better outcomes. But how do we move beyond the rhetoric? How do we move beyond what is written on paper and in the policy documents?

Tino rangatiratanga

How whānau and iwi might engage in education in ways that enhance the quality of relationships and improve the outcomes for students is still the question. Whānau involvement needs careful consideration in terms of power relationships. Often whānau are positioned as passive compliers with the system—so a shift is needed to collaborations and partnerships between Māori and the Crown where whānau Māori are positioned as equal players; as active shapers of educational settings; as co-owners and developers of the system. This is a move away from seeing whānau as there to assist their children learn at home what is taught at school (Cooper, Skerrett, Andreotti, Manning, Macfarlane, & Emery, 2010); to the language, knowledge and culture of the whānau being incorporated into all levels of the curriculum

and educational system. In the context then of whānau, iwi and school partnerships, whānau and iwi involvement needs to transform what and how students learn. Policymakers and teachers have to be at the ready in order to respond to those transformations rather than be stymied by them and remaining leaden-footed.

In Kōhanga Reo the notion of tino rangatiratanga is about socialising our tamariki into a commitment to a Māori way of living, a Māori way of being and a Māori way of speaking. Children are co-participants or co-constructionists in an important effort to shape Māori society, to shape Māori lives and ultimately our nation. Māori children are important allies in the regeneration of communities of Māori language speakers.

It is argued here that a tino rangatiratanga framework is about a whole-stream of education. The separation out of any part of the education sector does not bode well for Māori children. Rather, supports ought to be strong and steady at the base, early in the lives of Māori children, and built on as those children travel along the pathways of education. At the August 2010 Tuia te Ako Conference, Sir Mason Durie stressed that how highly the nation values indigeneity in the future will have a significant bearing on the future success of Māori in tertiary education. He talked about adjusting loyalties and needing to shift from having “strong loyalties to institutions to having strong loyalties to students”. The notion of strong loyalties to students and following students rather than following institutions is apposite and applies equally to the kōhanga and kura sectors as it does to the secondary and tertiary sectors.

Language survival is a saga of struggle. It has been a struggle ever since the Pākehā arrived creating an imperial outpost in Aotearoa New Zealand (Smith, 1999). Not long after the outpost’s official institution in January 1940, the Māori language was subjected to annihilatory policy, commencing with the Education Ordinance of 1847, followed by a succession

of policy and a procession of political attempts to eradicate it. But te reo Māori has survived—just—with some hard-hitting questions. Where do we want our valued Māori language positioned? Is te reo Māori an official language or not? What does being an official language mean? What does it mean for systemic change? Ought it be legitimated and validated through the curriculum? What is education in Aotearoa all about? Is education a people-process, or is education about processing people? Is it about unlocking people’s minds to explore the unknown and advancing potentials, or not? What do we want for our tamariki/mokopuna?

In summary, if we think of language as resource, then the growth of BEMS children will greatly enhance the nation’s wealth in a system in which both the official spoken and written languages are equally sanctioned in the way that was envisioned and envisaged in our founding document Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the sentiments of which are echoed by my late grandmother who said:

Nā, ko taku tino hiahia kia hoki ngā tamariki ki te ako i te reo Māori, kia hoki mai ai te mana o ō rātou tupuna ki a rātau; kia kotahi ai te iwi Māori ... Kātahi rātau ka mōhio nō rātau tēnei motu. I tēnei wā kāre te iwi tamariki e mōhio ana ko wai rātau, he aha rānei rātau, he Māori? Koirā aku tūmanako, kia tū tika te Tiriti i runga i te whakahaere a te Kuini o Ingarangi. Nā te mea i hūnaia mai tērā Tiriti ... Ko ngā painga i haere mai i te Rōpū, he whakahoa i ngā wahine Māori, kia āwhina rātau ki te kimi ora mō ngā tamariki, mō nga mātua. Kia kimi mātauranga ngā tamariki, kia tika ai tātau i roto i te ao Pākehā. (Szaszy, 1993, pp. 195–198)

Fishman (2000) raised the issue of the unprecedented reach of globalisation. He also discussed the contradiction that cultural beliefs and interpretations may not only be resistant to globalisation, but actually reinforced by the “threat” of globalisation. It is in this resistance

space, or interface (Durie, 2003), that the unprecedented reach of globalisation can be countered with a form of unprecedented power in response. That is tino rangatiratanga. Māori language education is interventionist education, with transformational aims. It attempts to intervene in the general exclusion and failure of many Māori children in education, particularly mainstream education. Further ideological clarification through research and development can help to overcome some of the general education and language policy and planning failures; fears and insecurities about the value of te reo Māori, Māori culture and identity-shaping educational praxis. Further ideological clarification is important for the future of our nation.

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