

Educating Māori: A Short History of Teaching Language to Māori

Dr Danny Keenan
Associate Professor
Te Kawa a Maui
School of Māori Studies
Victoria University of Wellington

Paper presented to the 'International Seminar: Malay, Māori and Pacific Language, Art and Culture. A collaboration between the Chair of Malay Studies, School of Māori Studies, Pacific and Samoan Studies and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Tanjong Malim, Perak, Malaysia at Te Herenga Waka Marae, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 1 November 2007.

ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the history relating to the teaching of the Māori language (and English) to Māori, since the 1800s through to the present day. It will canvas the many policy changes and contexts which influenced how the Government approached this task, before discussing moves taken by Māori in more recent times to take a greater control over Te Reo teaching and propagation to the whole country.

The educating of Māori people has long been a challenge faced by successive governments in New Zealand.

In the modern era, the general perception shared amongst policy-analysts is that the 'education system' has failed Māori. As a consequence, Māori educational attainment has lagged behind that of mainstream New Zealanders for some time. However, measures are now being taken, many initiated by Māori themselves, in order to address this imbalance and to support the aspiration of all Māori that educational opportunities be accessed and that the highest levels of attainment be achieved.

Originally, in the precontact era of our history (before 1800), Māori tribes ensured that the young were educated in tribal lore in a number of ways. The primary institution established for learning was the Whare Wananga, a place

where advanced learning and knowledge retention could be safeguarded and passed on.¹⁷ In those early days, Māori knowledge transmission was entirely oral, through the spoken word and through various means of expressional culture, like song and chant. The model of the Whare Wananga has been adopted in recent years by Māori when establishing a number of modern tertiary institutions which have been called 'Whare Wananga'. These have now generally achieved the same learning and research status of mainstream Universities.¹⁸

One of the first to be established was Te Wananga O Raukawa, which is situated at Otaki, about an hour's drive north of Wellington. The vision of Te Wananga is "to be a high quality institution of learning that increases knowledge and understanding through teaching and research." This Wananga has to date been a success story and is generally well-regarded for its work in bringing educational opportunity and attainment to Māori, many of whom would not have otherwise found their way to a University.¹⁹

As you may know, the earliest interest shown in Aotearoa New Zealand was by the English. In 1814, the first mission station was set up at Rangihoua, in the Bay of Islands. With the missionaries came the first schools and the first opportunities for Māori children to learn how to read and write. The language taught to Māori children was Māori, then in its infancy in written form; a Māori lexicon was still being developed by the missionaries, assisted by a team of scholars and linguists from Oxford University, in part assisted by Māori visiting England like Hongi Hika, the great warrior chief of the north.²⁰



Nga Puhi Chiefs Waikato, Hongi Hika (centre) with missionary Thomas Kendall. When Kendall was sent back to London in disgrace in 1820, he was accompanied by the two chiefs who spent time at Oxford University assisting linguists to develop a Māori lexicon.

¹⁷ Elsdon Best, *The Māori As He Was*, Wellington, 1974.

¹⁸ Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou. Struggle Without End*, Auckland, 1994 (2004).

¹⁹ <http://www.tauihu-wananga.Māori.nz/?q=node/5>

²⁰ Dorothy Urlich Cloher, *Hongi Hika. Warrior Chief*, Auckland, 2003.

Māori acceptance of reading and writing was rapid and, according to missionary accounts, literacy flourished amongst Māori. By the 1840s, it has been argued, Māori had made great strides towards full literacy and were at least familiar with, if not conversant with, dealing with the written word. But some scholars dispute this, arguing that in 1840 Māori were *not* comfortable with the 'sustaining power of the written word' over the more flexible oral nature of speechmaking to which they were long accustomed.²¹

As a consequence, when the Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840, between the British Crown and Māori, it was thought that Māori well understood the implications of signing documents. But the reverse is the case. Māori had little inkling of the sustaining power of written words as embedded in documents like the Treaty.²² This is not the place to discuss at length the many issues that subsequently arose as to conflicting translations of the Treaty documents. But one issue at the heart of subsequent discord between Crown and Māori arose from the extent to which Māori had become literate, and understood the full implications of the Treaty documents, or not.²³

Until the late 1860s, the educating of Māori largely remained the responsibility of mission societies, though the government did begin to provide learning opportunities for Māori in various forms, like hostels, but the system was uncoordinated and ineffective. The first real government impetus in providing for Māori education came in 1867, with the passing of the Native Schools Act. Under this Act, Native Schools were to be established amongst Māori for the purposes of advancing Māori education. What made this measure unique was the fact that instruction was to be given in English. At long last, Māori were being presented with the opportunity to learn how to read and write in English.²⁴

²¹ DF McKenzie, *Oral Culture, Literacy & Print in Early New Zealand: The Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington, 1985.

²² Danny Keenan, 'Hear the Word, See the Word', in John Thomson (ed), *Essays in Commemoration of Don McKenzie*, Wellington, 2002, pp.57-68.

²³ Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Auckland, 1987; TL Buick, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, New Plymouth, 1936.

²⁴ Judith Simon (ed), *Nga Kura Māori. The Native School System 1867-1969*, Auckland, 1998.



The Native School System 1867- 1969, introduced via the Native Schools Act 1867 (the same year Māori received the vote). Some Māori Scholars have represented Native Schools as a 'colonising mechanism.' But a generation of young Māori leaders, like Sir Apirana Ngata, Sir James Carroll, and Dr Peter Buck were products of the Native School System.

At first, Native Schools developed quite slowly. Not all Māori were interested in learning English – for some, learning English was akin to complying with Government policies of assimilation. If a Māori community wished to have a Native School, it was required to provide land for the School Building plus half of the salary for the teacher. Such criteria did restrict the spread of Native Schools for sure.

We can see from the figures below how Native Schools developed:

1880	57 Schools
1890	72 Schools
1950	159 Schools
1969	105 Schools ²⁵

On 1st February 1969, the Native School system was abolished because, as early as 1910, most Māori children were seen to be attending mainstream schools, not Native Schools. By 1950, the numbers of Māori children in State Schools was much in advance of Native Schools; and by 1960 there were 3 times as many Māori children in State Schools. By this time, Native Schools were clearly in decline as increasing numbers of Māori children were opting for the State School system.

²⁵ Figures adapted from Simon, *Nga Kura Māori*, p.134.

Running alongside these specific initiatives for the advancement of Māori learning were a series of general Education reforms which indirectly affected Māori. For example, in 1877 the Education Reform Act confirmed the English language as the medium of instruction in State and Native Schools. In 1907, agricultural education was introduced through the State School system, with young Māori actively encouraged to train as farmers. Māori were discerned as appropriately placed on the land, developing its economic capacity for the betterment of Māori and the nation. The problem for Māori in 1907 was that most ancestral land was gone; the capacity to create an economic base from the land had dramatically reduced over the previous 100 years.

From 1907 to the 1960s, very little time and resourcing was focussed upon improving Māori education. After the Second World War in 1945, the great movement of Māori to the urban centres began. The urbanising of Māori was attended with confidence that, in the new urban environment, Māori would prosper. The Māori Economic Social and Advancement Act was passed in 1945 in order to drive Māori development and provide impetus to the urban migrations now underway. And the rate of urbanising was considerable –

% of Māori dwelling in urban centres

1936	4%
1966	66%
2007	84% ²⁶

By 1960, the urbanising experience was seen to have largely failed Māori. In that year, the Māori Health Act was passed. Significantly, health was to take the place of social and economic advancement (1945). In that year too, the Hunn Report was released by the Government. Mr Jack Hunn, as Assistant Secretary of Māori Affairs, had been asked to compile a detailed report which presented a 'state of the nation' on Māori. Its particular focus was the urbanising experience. The Hunn report was extensive but, for our purposes, its pronouncements of Māori education were interesting. Mr Hunn concluded that Māori education attainment rates had declined significantly. As a way forward, he proposed that Māori education be integrated into the State system and curriculum. For Māori, the

²⁶ <http://www.stats.govt.nz/analytical-reports/looking-past-20th-century/culture-national-identity/Māori-grwth-urbanisation.htm>

development of a unique and appropriate curriculum adequate for Māori needs now seemed as far away as ever; the ethos to be followed was one of 'integration'.²⁷

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s however, urban Māori protest intensified dramatically. Young urban Māori moved to the forefront of Māori political discontent over many issues, some historical, some contemporary. One issue was that of education, as Māori attainment figures continued to decline. By the late 1970s, however, public policy stances toward Māori policy in general were perceptibly shifting, partly as a consequence of the urban Māori protest which had been joined by the more conservative groups like the Māori Women's Welfare League (established in 1951) and the more conservative New Zealand Māori Council (established in 1962). Education policy now underwent a series of 'tectonic' shifts, from assimilation/integration to multiculturalism to bi-culturalism.

In 1989, the Education Act was passed, heralding an era of quite dramatic reform in Education policy. In that Act, 'taha Māori' programmes were introduced into the State curriculum. By these programmes, the teaching of Māori language and culture was introduced into the mainstream, representing a significant shift in Government educational priorities.²⁸

In many respects however, by 1989, the government was in 'catch-up mode'. Māori had themselves now seized the initiative, where the educating of their young was concerned. Māori language surveys conducted since the 1950s had revealed a rapid decline in the numbers of Māori speakers of their own language. Accordingly, in 1981, at Pukeatua Marae in Wainuiomata (just north of Wellington), the Te Kohanga Reo movement was established. Essentially, Kohanga Reo were language nests aimed at preschool children; they were a place where children would learn Māori within a total immersion environment.

Te Kohanga Reo caught on very quickly, as these early figures demonstrate;

Nos of Te Kohanga Reo

1981	1
1982	50
1985	326

²⁷ JK Hunn, 'Report on the Department of Māori Affairs with Statistical Supplement' *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1961, G10.

²⁸ Raymond A Scott, *The Challenge of Taha Māori. A Pakeha Perspective*, Auckland, 1986.

1987	480
1988	520 ²⁹

Further educational developments led by Māori soon followed. In 1985, the first Kura Kaupapa School was established at Hoani Waititi Marae, in South Auckland. Kura Kaupapa were established within 5 years of Te Kohanga Reo because of the significant numbers of Māori-speaking children now moving through the education system. In the mid 1980s, mainstream primary schools were simply unable to cater for such numbers of children with high levels of fluency. Accordingly, the Kura Kaupapa were set up, to cater for their needs and, like the Te Kohanga Reo before them, they soon flourished.

In 1981, the next important step was taken with the establishment of Te Wananga O Raukawa at Otaki. This new institution was a solely Māori initiative, established to cater for the rising numbers of fluent Māori students now seeking a tertiary institution that reflected their own education journeys. Many of these students were coming from the Whare Kura, or Māori Secondary Schools. The number of Wananga in New Zealand has now increased to 3, with many possessing satellite campuses in the major cities to ensure that they remain competitive in the search for Māori students.

New Zealand has 5 education sectors:		<i>Māori Equivalent School</i>
Preschool	ages 3-5	<i>Te Kohanga Reo</i>
Primary (or Intermediate)	ages 5-12 ages 11-12)*	<i>Te Kura Kaupapa</i> (<i>Te Kura Kaupapa</i>)
Secondary	ages 13-18	<i>Te Whare Kura</i>
Tertiary	ages 18 plus	<i>Te Whare Wananga</i>

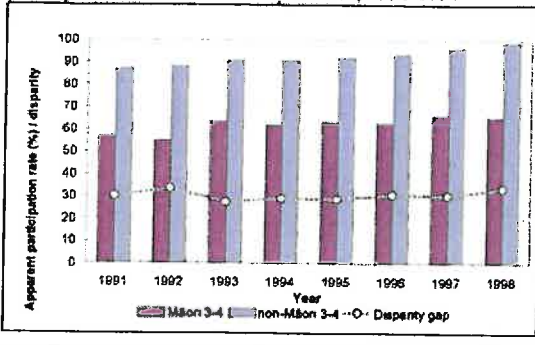
*In the major cities and towns, Intermediate is a stand-alone School, separate from Primary. In rural areas, the 'full primary' School incorporates both, as does the *Kura Kaupapa*.

So, where do these initiatives leave Māori today? The relative position of Māori is complex but some late-1990s figures may be examined for indicators of Māori achievement:³⁰

²⁹ See <http://www.kohanga.ac.nz/> for brief history and background to Te Kohanga Reo's development.

³⁰ See <http://www.tpk.govt.nz/Māori/education/graduates.asp> for a full range of graphs and analysis, as appears above.

Figure 5
Māori and non-Māori early childhood apparent participation rates for 3 and 4 year olds, 1991-1998

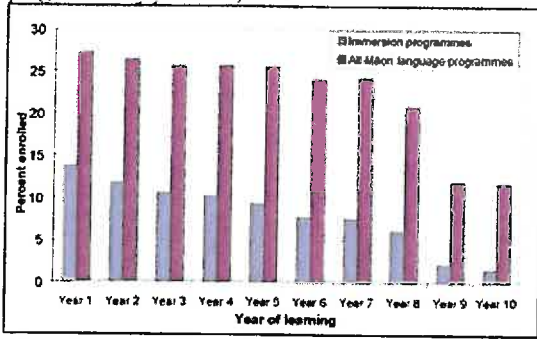


PRESCHOOL

Māori participation rates 1991-1998, following the rapid increase of Te Kohanga Reo.

Relative to the numbers of children attending mainstream preschool centers, the numbers of Māori attending preschool Kohanga was high.

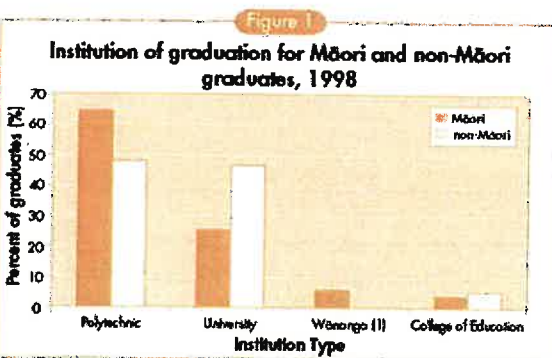
Figure 6
Proportion of Māori aged 5-14 enrolled in schools in immersion programmes and all Māori language programmes by year level, 1998



PRIMARY

In 1998, more Māori children aged between 5-14 were enrolled in 'all Māori language programmes' than were enrolled in 'total immersion'.

In other words, more children received their language instruction in the mainstream, than at Kura Kaupapa. Note too, that immersion language instruction declined as the children got older.



TERTIARY

By 1998, after 11 years of growth, Te Whare Wananga were making small inroads into the Māori Tertiary Sector. Most Māori students were graduating through Polytechnics with Diplomas and Certificates. Lesser numbers of Māori were emerging from Universities. But the Wananga figures are good, given the intensely competitive nature of the Tertiary market.

In the end, there always were many political factors which impacted upon the educating of Māori. It is difficult to separate the social and political context from any narrative (or history) of Māori attainment in education. In New Zealand, the State has undoubtedly been the major player in this provision of education. In more recent times, however, Māori have taken a greater control of 'educating Māori.' This has undoubtedly been a positive move for Māori, though development in this area still constrained by the State's provision of resources (or lack of).

Māori education has undoubtedly developed since the mid 1980s. Whilst the reality today is that Māori still lag behind the mainstream, the hope of all Māori (and especially Schools like ours – Te Kawa a Maui and Te Herenga Waka) is that Māori education will continue to evolve and attain the highest levels of achievement, perhaps in time constituting an Māori education 'revolution from below' – a time when we realise that, almost without warning, Māori have become the most highly educated group in New Zealand.

FURTHER READING

JM Barrington and TH Beaglehole, *Māori Schools in a Changing Society*, 1974.

Michael Belgrave et al, *Waitangi Revisited. Perspectives on the Treaty of Waitangi*, 2005.

Aroha Harris, *Hikoi. Twenty Years of Māori Protest*, 2004.

Maria Bargh (ed) *Resistance*, 2006.

Peter Adds et al, *The Portrayal of Māori and Te Ao Māori in Broadcasting*, 2005.

Danny Keenan is of Te Atiawa descent. He is from New Plymouth and was educated at Massey University and Victoria University. Danny received his PhD in History in 1994; his thesis focussed on the activities of the Native Land Court in the 1860s.