



**THE MĀORI LANGUAGE NEST PROGRAM:**

**VOICES OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE REVITALIZATION IN AOTEAROA, NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup>**

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**A b s t r a c t :** This article features interviews with five Māori teachers who have been directly involved with Māori education for many years. They present their ideas and practices concerning both *Kohanga Reo*, the successful language nest program which has been key for the revitalization and regeneration of the Māori language, in New Zealand, and *Kura Kaupapa*, the Māori primary and secondary education program.

**Key words:** Māori language nest, language endangerment, language revitalization.

**R e s u m o :** Este artigo apresenta entrevistas com cinco professores Māori que têm estado diretamente envolvidos com a educação Māori por muitos anos. Eles apresentam suas idéias e práticas sobre *Kohanga Reo*, o programa bem sucedido de ninho de língua, que tem sido fundamental para a revitalização e regeneração da língua Māori, na Nova Zelândia e também sobre *Kura Kaupapa*, o programa Māori de educação primária e secundária.

**P a l a v r a s - c h a v e :** ninho de língua Māori, línguas ameaçadas, revitalização de línguas.

## **I. Introduction**

This article presents the Māori early education *Kohanga Reo* “language nest” program, the Māori *Kura Kaupapa*, primary and secondary education programs, in *Aotearoa*<sup>2</sup>, New Zealand, as well as several other issues concerning language maintenance and revitalization, through the voices of five Māori teachers who have been directly involved with Māori education for many years. As it is generally the case in colonial enterprises around the world, education and even care of the indigenous children have never been a

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<sup>1</sup> The three authors visited New Zealand during the second semester of 2017, in the framework of an academic agreement between the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and Massey University (MU). Marcus Maia is a professor of Linguistics at UFRJ and was an honorary researcher fellow at the Department of Linguistics of the School of Humanities (MU), between August-December, 2017, with a CAPES fellowship. Marcia Nascimento develops a post-doc on language nest programs, with a CNPq scholarship, under the supervision of Marcus Maia. Chang Whan is a cultural anthropologist with the Indigenous Museum of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They have a blog where several of their visits to Māori schools and other institutions in New Zealand are documented: <https://maia81.wixsite.com/viagem-a-aotearoa>

<sup>2</sup> *Aotearoa* is the original Māori name for New Zealand, meaning “the land of the long white cloud”.

colonizer concern. This was the case in Brazil, and *Aotearoa*, New Zealand, was not an exception. Even though the colonization of New Zealand by the British took place over two centuries later than Brazil's colonization by the Portuguese, land confiscation, missionary conversion, colonial policies of assimilation, which included punishment if children spoke their native languages were routine both in Brazil and in New Zealand.

An important difference between these two countries, regarding their indigenous peoples, should be noted, however. While in Brazil, indigenous rights were only officially recognized in the Constitution of 1988, in New Zealand, the *Te Tiriti o Waitangi*, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed as early as 1840. In spite of the fact that it recognized the establishment of a British government in New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi also clearly stated that the Māori would maintain absolute authority over their land and possessions, including their intangible heritage, represented by language, cultural values, spiritual beliefs and practices. However, even if issued over a century apart, both documents have been assessed as not having fulfilled all their promises yet. Nevertheless, Brazilian indigenous peoples recognize that the 1988 Constitution has promoted advances in land demarcation and in indigenous bilingual education. Likewise, in New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi is also recognized as the founding document of *Aotearoa*, even though it was only after World War II that education for Māori children started to be regarded as a real priority<sup>3</sup>.

During the 1970's and 1980's, early childhood education issues gained momentum in New Zealand, both among the Māori and the *Pakeha* (white people). Māori tribes all over New Zealand were very concerned about the loss of language and cultural values and started the *Kohanga Reo* (language nest) movement, aiming at language and culture revitalization through intergenerational transmission to future generations. As evaluated in the document *Aims*, produced by Te Kohanga Reo National Trust in 2003, the *Kohanga Reo* program started with two main goals, namely, that children would learn *Te Reo*, the Māori language, and also Māori cultural values, including the spiritual dimension, through full immersion, and that language and cultural learning would be fostered and supported by the *whanau*, the extended family.

A children's education curriculum called *Te Whariki*, was then developed based on four principles: (i) *whakamana*, empowerment of children to learn and grow, (ii) *kotahitanga*, holistic development, (iii) *whanau tangata*, family and community are integral part of the curriculum, and (iv) *nga hononga*, learning is a product of relations between children and people, places and things.

Berardi-Wiltshire, Petrucci & Maia (2015) presented some of the principles of Māori Education. Maia & Berardi-Wiltshire (2015) interviewed Hinurewa Poutu, a linguist who is a member of the Māori language commission. In the present article, we will learn in further detail about *kohanga reo* and *kura kaupapa*, the pre-school, primary and

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<sup>3</sup>The Treaty of Waitangi was not recognized in New Zealand law until 1975. Individual Māori could seek compensation for breaches of the Treaty post 1975. In 1985 compensation could be sought for breaches post 1840.

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secondary schools that immerse children in Māori language and culture, through the voices of five Māori teachers who have been directly (and passionately) involved with Māori education programs for many years: Toni Waho, Brenda Soutar, Manu Kawana, Dianne Pomare and Kiriana Hakopa. We will present below selected aspects of the interviews that they gave us in Palmerston North and in Auckland, New Zealand, in the month of October, 2017.

### II - Toni Waho



**Picture 1 – Toni Waho**

Toni Waho is now a Senior Lecturer at the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Massey University. He was one of the founders of *Mana Tamariki* and a principal of that school for several years. He was a leading supporter of the *Kohanga Reo* and *Kura Kaupapa* movements and worked closely with the Head Office *Te Puni Kokiri* and the Ministry of Education, developing and analysing Education policy.

**Marcus Maia:** Toni, I would like to start the interview by asking you to tell us about your linguistic history.

**Toni Waho:** My first language is English. I am a highly fluent native speaker of English. My father was my Māori parent and my mother was my *Pakeha* (white) parent. Her family has links to England, Wales and Scotland, and they have been in New Zealand for six generations, a very old pioneering family. My tribal area is in the middle of the North Island, the region of Mount *Ruapehu*. However, I was raised away from my tribal home. We went there about three times a year, but I was raised in an urban environment. As a child, I would only hear Māori being spoken at my grandmother's house. She was raised as a Māori speaker. My greatgrandfather and my grandmother only spoke Māori to each other. On the other hand, my father himself only spoke Māori until he went to school. Many people of that and of previous generations, as you must have heard, were beaten in the classroom or in the playground, if they spoke Māori. When my grandmother was at school age, she heard of this and she refused to go to school. That was the year 1920 and it was already illegal to keep a child from going to school. Eventually, the headmaster came to her house with the police to take her to school. Then, on the first and only day she went to school, she was beaten for speaking Māori! Then she ran home and never went back to school again. So, she had a very limited western education, but her parents agreed that she should not have to go to school.

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**Marcus Maia:** So, Toni, Māori was your second language?

**Toni Waho:** My second language was French. I was born in 1961 and, when I was 12, I started studying French. I wanted to become a lawyer and for academic reasons I had to have a second language, but at those times Māori was just not offered. Had it been offered I probably would have taken it. French was regarded here in our country as the next best language to English. The third best language was German and slowly Japanese came in to compete with French and German.

**Marcus Maia:** Māori wasn't even in the competition!

**Toni Waho:** Not even in the competition. I studied French for five years in New Zealand through the audiolingual method and then I went to British Columbia, Canada, as an exchange student. I had an experience of immersion in French taught by Quebecois teachers and I became a fluent speaker of French. **Marcus Maia:** So, how did you learn Māori?

**Toni Waho:** I had always had, though, a deep respect for my Māori heritage. We used to have a tradition that the eldest child in every family would be given to the grandparents. But in my father generation that tradition had begun to change. Even today, my son did not give me his child and my daughter, who is yet to have a child, I do not see her giving us grandparents her child. That tradition is very rarely kept alive by someone of my generation.

**Chang Whan:** Was there an explanation for that traditional custom of giving children to grandparents?

**Toni Waho:** It was an insurance and an assurance that the values are passed on intergenerationally. The eldest child was the leader of the family. Then the elders would be sure that people in the new generation would be given what they call *mana*. And that includes the language.

**Marcus Maia:** Well, this custom ended up being used in the *kohanga reo*, language nests programs, later, right?

**Toni Waho:** As a concept, yes. In *kohanga reo*, nonbiological children are systematically exposed to nonbiological grandparents.

**Marcus Maia:** So, how did you finally learn the Māori language?

**Toni Waho:** When I was in Canada, I decided that when I came back to New Zealand, I would dive into Māori. My parents had split and I actually did not have a home. My native speaking grandmother was still alive and I went to live with her. So, I started to learn *Te Reo* Māori when I was 20. Interestingly, aside from my grandmother, my first Māori teacher was Mary Boyce, a non Māori audiolingual teacher who is now a leading linguist here in New Zealand. She was a wonderful teacher and a very fluent speaker of Māori. Her husband was Māori and they raised their child speaking Māori. Then I went to Victoria University in Wellington. I had a tribal uncle who knew my family very well and who had spent many days with my greatgrandfather, whom I referred to earlier as being alive when I was a boy. My greatgrandfather was one of the surviving elders at a time when the language was almost totally gone. So, he took me under his wing and taught me for three years. Because of my immersion experience with French, in Canada, I encouraged him to turn his classes into immersion classes. At that time, he became one

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of the core members of the *Kohanga Reo* movement. At the same time, *Te Ataarangi*, the Māori immersion program had also started.

**Marcus Maia:** When was that?

**Toni Waho:** That was in the early eighties. In 1985, I left Victoria. I had switched from Law to Language and Culture. At that same time, my long time partner and I decided to have a child and only speak Māori to her. She had a native speaker father, who is still alive. So, we decided to raise our children, only speaking Māori to them. We realized that we needed to get the language back into the next generation. Ten years later, I met the linguist Joshua Fishman and he became my guru (laughs). Actually, what we have done at *Mana Tamariki* was based on him.

**Marcus Maia:** What was the role of Joshua Fishman?

**Toni Waho:** As you know, Fishman is the creator of the graded intergenerational disruptive scale for threatened languages, the GIDS, which is an 8-level evaluative framework of language endangerment. He evaluates language vitality and death, using levels of magnitude, as the Richter scale is used to measure an earthquake. So, in the Richter scale, 8 is the worst earthquake. So, for revitalization, if the “earthquake” has decimated the language, there would be this rubble with very little language, but if you are at stage 6, there is still language at the community. Then you can still ensure the language is transmitted intergenerationally. The GIDS was very important to what we did here. Prior to that, we had already started the *Kohanga Reo* program, we had a first school, *Manawatu* and then we created a second *Kohanga Reo* here, *Mana Tamariki*. We said: it does not matter if the language is not at the homes, that is OK, because we can create the speakers at the schools.

**Chang Whan:** That must have been a challenging moment, wasn't it?

**Toni Waho:** Oh, yes! We were even sort of arrogant (laughs)... We had this twang, this accent, we were not even native speakers! But who cares?! Because if we don't do it, who else is gonna do it? When I did the research to get my postgraduate degree, I went back and remembered those early times and concluded that was right. And it was not only me, of course. As my partner and I had decided to raise our children speaking Māori, many other couples did so too. Brenda Soutar and Milton Rahihi did exactly the same, as did several others. We didn't even discuss it, we just did it! We then opened still another school in 1995. It took us two years to conceptually adjust our thinking to plan how we would take the organization of the program from us the teachers being the only language source to the parents and teachers working in partnership model. We then decided that we would only take children who had at least one parent speaking only Māori to them. If we had wanted children with both parents speaking Māori, as it was the case with my partner and me, Brenda and Milton, there would have been nobody here. So, we did that. **Marcia Nascimento:** How long did this transition take?

**Toni Waho:** It took us two years to move that policy through the *Kohanga*. Now I think that in ten years time, all the families in *Mana Tamariki* will have both parents speaking strictly only Māori to their children. So, that is the story.

**Chang Whan:** When did you become the principal of *Mana Tamariki*?

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**Toni Waho:** That was in 1996, and I resigned one year ago due to my health. Five years ago, I had been granted permission by my school to also come to Massey University Māori Studies to help build the teacher education program, where I work now.

**Marcus Maia:** So, in a nutshell, why was the *Kohanga Reo* language nest program so successful in your opinion?

**Toni Waho:** Well, that is what I said, the native speaking elders interact regularly with the non-speaking *mokopuna*, the children. It makes sense. You can't beat that. **Marcus**

**Maia:** What are the challenges that you see that still need to be met?

**Toni Waho:** Well...uh... Do you know what the word **zealot** means? Someone who is wildly passionate to the point of lunacy... (laughs). We don't have enough of them now! I am 56 now, I have been doing this for over thirty years and I am feeling... that is what it is... We have been trying to pass it on, but... I just can't see that lunacy anymore! The zealot, the lunatic passion. You see, what people have done... Not only with Māori. There is the Welsh guy who even went on a hunger strike. Ben Yehuda, the linguist who reconstructed Modern Hebrew! Hebrew was taken out of the Torah and taken to be a lingua franca in Israel. It is the national language. You know, that high level of commitment...

**Marcus Maia:** You don't see that anylonger here?

**Toni Waho:** No, I don't. But I still feel confident that there is always going to be a group that are the keepers of the language. The Māori world tends to believe that everything is well, because of all these programs, the *Kohanga Reo*, the *Kura Kaupapa*, the teachers training program. And also because of Māori radio and television channels. Okay, but if we look back at the GIDS, in terms of that scale, we are not yet at level 6, where the language is alive in the community. We went to 4, because of the schools. Then we went to 4-5 literacy and even to 2, with television and radio systems, according to the GIDS scale. To get to level 1, even if we pushed like hell to get the language into the Parliament, we did not completely succeed. And at the public administration level, you cannot have your life administered in the Māori language, anyway. I can't get my driver's license in Māori, I can't register the birth of my child in Māori, I can't function in Māori! Now if you compare with the Basque case, they invested in intergenerational transmission, but at the same time they took other actions. Take the Basque Mondragon community in the Basque country. They went from 39 to 52 percent of speakers and the language is in public administration. There is still that element of lunacy there! That passion, that madness for language! That is what it really takes, Marcia, also for the Kaingang revitalization! Or else it does not happen.

**Marcia Nascimento:** But your generation had that, right?

**Toni Waho:** Oh, yes! We protested, we marched, we fought, we were aggressive! We were radical, but not usually violent. Well, a few times there may have been some element of violence, but mostly was the police being violent against us.

**Chang Whan:** But, Toni, a lot has been achieved, there is a new mental disposition, that is what I feel...

**Toni Waho:** Well, that is true. Some statistics show that we have gone from 8% of speakers in 1979 to 26% of fluent speakers now. I'm talking about really fluent speakers,

there are other statistics, though. But it seems we are falling back to 21% now. I am talking about adults, not including children in the numbers. They are not yet being counted in the national statistics.

**Marcus Maia:** Is there a tension between parents and teachers about when to start to have English in the Māori schools?

**Toni Waho:** Well, there is tension, but we do have an excellent English language program at the schools. It is a late introduction program, it varies a bit, but English is usually introduced only in grade 8. I would prefer to introduce English in grade 9, but the parents do not want that. I myself would prefer 10, but the parents would walk out. Despite that we have possibly the most successful English language students in the national exams. They first achieve a high level academic proficiency in Māori. Then they also achieve a high formal proficiency in English, while keeping their Māori high level. I think that is the right approach.

**Marcus Maia:** What do you think about the proposal that Māori become mandatory at all New Zealand mainstream schools?

**Toni Waho:** That is an issue that divides the language world in New Zealand. There is no unanimity. And those of us who are zealots and lunatics for the language worry that such a program would suck up the already meager resources that the Māori programs receive. It might be beneficial for the greater picture, but it would probably not be beneficial for the Māori language itself. There is a risk, as I said, that the meager resources for the Māori programs would be dispersed and taken away from the environments where the language is effectively taught. I am personally in favor that every New Zealander is comfortable with the pronunciation of the language and supportive of its use.

**Chang Whan:** Is Te Reo Māori taught as an optional foreign language in mainstream schools?

**Toni Waho:** In most schools, yes. There is usually some degree of exposure to Māori in New Zealand classrooms, depending on the willingness and comfort of the teacher. And I think that this is right. The worst thing is to force someone do something that they cannot do or that they don't want to do. Now, as I said, the development of good pronunciation skills and the fostering of tolerance and respect, of course, this is important. **Marcia**

**Nascimento:** Was your generation the first in the revitalization process?

**Toni Waho:** The Fishman mantra that “you lose the language in one generation, but it takes at least three to get it back” has not even been achieved here yet. Say, my generation is supposed to have been one, but we were not native speakers. Now, my children, the second generation, are fluent speakers of Māori, but the third generation is beginning to arrive now.

**Marcia Nascimento:** I have another question. In the past 20 years in Brazil, several special affirmative indigenous teachers programs were created in many public universities as a result of movements on the part of the indigenous groups and other organizations. I would like to hear you talk a little more about the Māori teacher education programs in New Zealand.

**Toni Waho:** Let us talk about teachers for the *Kohanga Reo*, language nest programs. The *Kohanga Reo* Trust is very very strong about preventing western institutions from

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stealing the *Kohanga Reo* approach. So, they have their own training programs. Of course, these programs have had to get approved by the state to get funding. The *Kohanga Reo* Trust receives about five million NZ dollars a year to train their own teachers. When I was a trustee, we had about four hundred trainees in the teacher education programs. The programs were all designed around the *Kohanga Reo* curriculum and based on our approach to language revitalization and regeneration. The language has to be revitalized and regenerated through transmission. At *Mana Tamariki*, we send people who want to be teachers to other training programs. We have chosen other pathways. And I will leave it there. In our country, we have seven main universities, several colleges and technical institutions and we have about thirty or thirty some teaching programs. We have four Māori *Wananga* (higher education providers managed by Māori), one of them is a tribal university at the Bay of Plenty. There is *Te Wananga o Aotearoa*, which is national. There is also a teacher training program which only serves the Auckland area. We have our program here at Māori Studies, at Massey University, which used to be a four year program, but it is becoming a three year program, starting next year. To get into the undergraduate program, candidates are evaluated as to their language proficiency through interviews and written assignments and, of course, they have to meet all university criteria. Mari Ropata-Te Hei and Anahera Bowen have done the work of revising and adapting the 4 year program into the three year program which is about to start. **Marcia Nascimento:** What about the postgraduate program here at Massey?

**Toni Waho:** The postgraduate program, that I was the principal redesigner of, is brand new, this year, it is a one-year program, and to be accepted students have to have an undergraduate degree and be highly proficient in Māori. However, the real challenge now for us in teacher training is to specialize teachers for the secondary level. We are doing very well at producing relatively good teachers for the junior level. We have done a lot of work for the infant toddler area and for the young children, but we still have a lot to do in the secondary area. And also, of course, in replacing us.

**Marcus Maia:** In 2015, I visited *Te Wananga O Raukawa*, the Māori university in Otaki, and I talked to one of the elders who founded it, Whatarangi. We talked about the sharing of the successful experience of Māori revitalization and regeneration, as you say. What do you think about this idea of sharing these experiences with other indigenous peoples in the world?

**Toni Waho:** We have to! Talking about Ecolinguistics, the eco part means we need to either preserve or lose. In *Aotearoa*, New Zealand, we have lost the ecological environment where our language developed. We do not live as we used to do traditionally, of course. We are still Māori, but we have lost our eco, our natural environment. That is sad, but we live with that. Now, look at the Amazon, at the tribal people there. Many threatened and even murdered so that their land can be taken. It is all related, the loss of land, the loss of people, the loss of the environment, the loss of language and culture. It is important to help, and many of us are still sitting back and realizing the enormity of the task. It is global. And it takes a global effort to save the globe.

**Marcus Maia:** Toni, would you have anything else to add to this interview?

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**Toni Waho:** Do you see the possibility of bringing indigenous teachers from Brazil here in the future? And vice-versa? This should be something really important to develop in the near future. Marcia, I believe that your people, the Kaingang of southern Brazil, should be at stage 6 in the Fishman scale. You must preserve that stage 6. Nurture that 6. Connect those Kaingang nonspeaking children with the speaking elders. Try to keep the language at the homes, that is your challenge.

### III – Brenda Soutar



**Picture 2 – Brenda Soutar**

Brenda Soutar is a leader at *Mana Tamariki*, an important urban language nest in the city of Palmerston North. Besides being a teacher and the current principal of Mana Tamariki, Brenda was a member of the writing team for the update of *Te Whāriki*, the *kohanga reo* curriculum.

**Marcus Maia** – *Kia Ora*, Brenda! I would like to start by asking you to tell us about your story, your linguistic history and your career.

**Brenda Soutar** – *Kia Ora!* I am the child of two Māori native speaking parents. Both my parents grew up in their tribal areas, with the elders, very connected to whom they were. By the time they had us, however, we were part of the generation of Māori who were raised speaking English, by native speaking parents! I have recently spoken to my father about this, because my mother has passed away. It has been quite interesting to learn that they never made a formal decision, they didn't talk about it or discuss it, it was just so natural and normal to them by the time they had us. They were born in the 1930's and, by the 50's and 60's, when they began to raise us with English as our first language, it didn't even enter their minds that they might speak their first language to us. That's how normalised speaking English had become in just over three decades. And that was the case across the country. But the fortunate thing was that my parents grew up in their tribal areas in rural regions of the country, they were very connected to whom they were, so they passed that to us. And their values were Māori values, that we lived by. So, even

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though the language was English, we probably grew up with a reasonable ear for the language, understanding a reasonable amount of Māori, and knowing how to behave in Māori culture situations. There were many people in my generation who were actually already second generation of people who missed the language, so I think that in a way we were very fortunate and I am not angry about it and do not blame my parents for it. I know it was the result of the historical circumstances of the time. So by the time we decided to become teachers, to take teacher training, the *Kohanga Reo* movement had just started in New Zealand and I was struggling through a mainstream teacher education college, not because of the academic work, but because it was very difficult to pursue anything that might be important to being Māori. At that time, it was very difficult to have a placement in a Māori immersion school, as it was also to get a place at the language nests. The teachers education colleges here did not come to terms to how those topics concerning Māori students could feed into their programs. So, I became very disheartened and left two thirds of the way through my qualification and went to work in a Māori language nest. I was just really fortunate that, in the first language nest I worked at, there were three Māori women who were native speakers working there too. I was with them for one year. I didn't love everything about it. I certainly struggled with some of the practices that didn't really match the values I have been raised with. However, they did speak Māori all the time to one another there. So, I was immersed in the language and that really boosted my *Te Reo Māori*. Then, by the time my partner and I had our first child, I was confident enough, so when we came in contact with a couple of other families who were speaking only Māori to their children, I knew enough Māori to take up the challenge of also raising my children speaking only Māori. My partner's father had been raised speaking Māori until he was 5 years old, but then, when he went to school, he had to speak only English. In New Zealand at that era, there was physical punishment if children spoke Māori at the schools. But he always maintained a good understanding of the language and the culture. So, even though my partner Milton had not been raised speaking Māori, he was always very comfortable in Māori situations, he was always very grounded, he knew who he was, he was always connected to his tribe's lands, he understood the values. So that's how it all started, someone who didn't speak any Māori and myself, who could speak some. But more important was our desire to do it and our strong commitment. So, from day one, we spoke only Māori to our children. We raised our children speaking only Māori to them and we came in contact with other people doing the same and together we established *Mana Tamariki* in the city of Palmerston North, as a *kohanga reo*, a language nest. We opened the doors to everyone else in the community in the year of 1990.



Picture 3 - Mana Tamariki language nest and school in Palmerston North, NZ

**Marcus Maia:** Brenda, *Mana Tamariki* is now a true model of a Māori *kohanga reo* and school. Could you talk a little more about the foundation of this marvelous language nest in those times, almost thirty years ago? How was the beginning of the story?

**Brenda Soutar:** So, at the beginning, there was a core group of people who were committed to do it and Milton and I were part of that group. There were four of us who became the long term founders, two couples. We didn't really have early childhood qualifications. We were thinking more in terms of a place where our children could be safe and loved and with their own language, traditions and culture guiding everything. At that time, there was very little funding, but there was a lot of faith pushing us all. And then we learned about Sociolinguistics. We also started to learn about the good principles of early childhood education. Our challenge was how to create a space which would keep children motivated and interested. We also learned from Sociolinguistics about the importance of the family to language recovery and regeneration.

**Marcus Maia:** Was it at that time that you met the sociolinguist Joseph Fishman? **Brenda Soutar:** Yes, by 1995, our school had been established as a home school and we made the decision that at least one of the parents had to speak only Māori to their children at home for the duration of their education at *Mana Tamariki* and, hopefully, for life. So, we formed a community that operated in the Māori language. They woke up in Māori, they spent their whole day at school in Māori, then they went home and slept in Māori. At some time during that period another founding couple, Penny Poutu and Toni Waho took a trip overseas and, on that trip, they engaged with Joshua Fishman and Bernard Spolsky. We were then able to deepen our thinking about our projects. We started to grow that relationship and eventually Massey University hosted a conference and the Fishmans came to that conference. We were asked to be their hosts on behalf of the Māori Institute there at Massey. So Fishman and his wife came and met the whole community. Bernard Spolsky, a New Zealand linguist also came out at another time. So alongside those interesting linguistic ideas on how to recover and maintain a language in a cultural situation like ours, there was our traditional thinking too. And although this had an important impact on our curriculum development, we were very careful not to throw away what we were doing and bring these new ideas in. We deeply analyzed how those ideas would enhance what we were already doing here, not only to ensure that there wasn't any conflict with our traditional values, but also to determine what belongs to us and what came from outside. When you come from a colonization process, it is very important to

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try to determine what belongs to our traditional values, to our ancestors traditional world views and what we have taken on board as a result of the colonization process. Sometimes we do not know the answers to that, but we should try and do our best. I do remember that Bernard Spolsky made the comment that although the children were speaking Māori, from a distance they sounded as though they were speaking English, implying that they in a way were following English patterns. And this challenged us to consider how English was still dominating. And yes, when we have children who come from the more traditional rural areas, definitely their pronunciation differs from the more urban children. **Chang Whan:** So, Brenda, why is it that *Mana Tamariki* is so special?

**Brenda Soutar:** I think one of our unique things is the entry criteria that we established from the start that children had to have at least one of their parents consistently speaking to them in Māori at home. Then, when our *Kohanga* celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the community decided to strengthen that entry criteria, establishing that both parents now had to speak to the children in Māori at home. And we continued to have enrollments! And I think that is really unique because it is quite hard to create a community where everyone has that level of commitment. In the way most language nests have been established in New Zealand it is very common that children come and speak Māori at the school during the day and then go home and speak only English or a mix. But really what we have learned from Joshua Fishman is that it is the family and only the family that can regenerate and revitalize the language. No matter how special the school is, language has to be handed down from parents to children. So this is really a unique part of who we are. **Chang Whan:** As you know, Marcia here is a linguist and a Kaingang native speaker. Early childhood education is not a field that has been very privileged in Brazil. What would be your advice to her about the process to create a Kaingang language nest?

**Brenda Soutar:** I know, early childhood education is mostly babysitting... laughs... Actually, this has been our journey too, here in *Aotearoa*, New Zealand. Despite having our world leading curriculum, *Te Whariki*, if you look at the way education is funded in New Zealand, early childhood education is the least funded. I think a nation shows where it puts its values by what it funds. So, I think we are still struggling with this too. We have to promote teachers as researchers and qualified child educators and not as glorified babysitters. One of the most important things that I have learned is to have faith in our own cultural traditions. Colonization creates this fear that our indigenous cultures are not good enough. When you move to this position of total faith in the beliefs and world views of your ancestors, then this is the basis for the curriculum and everything else will fall into place. So, now that our children have become adults and have their own children, I can see that being educated in that way, they are very open to new ideas. That was harder for our generation because our own culture and language had been made invisible to us. But when children have grown up totally at home with who they are, when they move into other ways of being and doing, they are just very comfortable. They're not so judgmental, they are very calm and at peace and that is when they are most open to learn.

**Marcus Maia:** Brenda and Manu, I have been involved with indigenous education in Brazil for at least three decades and a common scenario there is that many indigenous

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schools start out based on traditional cultural values and on the indigenous languages and then they end up along the process being assimilated in the nonindigenous practices of mainstream education. However, having visited both Māori schools and also mainstream kindergartens here in New Zealand and talked to teachers at these places, I have the impression that, here, this is going the other way around! I mean, the *Te Whariki* curriculum being such a well structured philosophy and program, seems to have impacted even the mainstream schools. Is that a correct impression?

**Brenda Soutar:** Yes, I would say so, Marcus. And that curriculum document is the reason for that. My personal view is that Māori early childhood education is ahead of the rest of the system. It is very common to attend a national meeting of early childhood education and everyone, Māori and non-Māori, stand up together and sing in Māori. But perhaps, apart the indigenous school system, *Te Whariki*, still, is not so strong as it could be in some of the mainstream schools.

**Marcia Nascimento:** Brazil has a very bureaucratic system of teacher qualification and accreditation and there are many nonindigenous teachers in the indigenous schools. It is a very difficult situation. In my case, for example, we struggle for a real Kaingang education, but there are many difficulties coming from the system. I would like to hear from you how is this process here.

**Brenda Soutar:** I realized this when I traveled to the United States in the past years and I realize there are all these regulations and difficulties, challenges and barriers, as a result of a culture of fear, where people are scared of consequences, if they do not adhere strictly to regulatory processes. I think this was a really difficult pathway also for our people here. Even before 1982, when the first language nest was established, there was a lot of unrest, protest, anger and frustration, particularly for those young Māoris of that time, in the sixties and seventies. Then our elders came together and basically guided the establishment of the pre-schools as a way to recover the language. But it is really important that while you are here in this building, to remember that this was only this much of our dream. We started in very humble buildings, nothing elaborate. Really what I can say is that it takes strong faith and commitment, persistence. A building is just a building, but you need a core group of people who hold on to the values they believe in. As to this idea of nonindigenous teachers being part of the process, for me, here in this country, many of our parents are not Māori. You have to find a way of building a relationship. For us, for our cultural values, everyone can belong. If that person is the mother of Māori children, we will find a way to include them. However, in my opinion, the people leading the direction have to be of the genealogy, because otherwise you will not have the spiritual connection to the ancestors. In the Māori way, we learn from doing it, not from hearing the story, so only your people can do it. I know it is a hard struggle, but how else would our children know that we can do it?

### IV – Manu Kawana, tribal leader and cultural consultant



**Picture 4 – Manu Kawana**

**Marcus Maia:** Manu, can we start by you telling us a bit of your linguistic profile and the story of how you became involved in Māori education?

**Manu Kawana:** *Ka pai, Te na Kou Tou!* Well, it has been a very long journey. In my childhood, my parents both spoke the language. My grandparents on both sides also spoke *Te Reo Māori*. We were eight boys and three girls and we were brought up around the culture. We were always hearing the language being spoken, even though my parents would not talk to us in Māori in day to day conversations. We were very familiar with the language that was spoken at the *Marae*<sup>4</sup>. My real introduction to really speaking the Māori language was at secondary school. I was already a good listener at those days. I had one particular teacher at the school who inspired me to also become a teacher. He was really great, he encouraged us a lot and supported us all the way. He would let us learn at our own pace, we did not have a lot thrown at us at the same time. But it wasn't until I was in my mid to late twenties that I actually started to acknowledge the fact that I was Māori. And that was when I decided to take upon myself to utilize what I already had and build on it. I then engaged with my Māori surroundings as much as I could and became involved with my language as much as I could as well. At that time, there was a lot that I didn't understand, but I moved on from there. Once I had a reasonable amount of the language under my belt, next thing I know I met my wife, who is Māori as well, and we had our children and made the decision that they would learn the language. Our first two children studied in a total immersion school. The other five children also went through *Kohanga Reo* and *Kura Kaupapa*.

**Marcus Maia:** So you called upon yourself this role as a Māori educator. Can you tell us more about it?

**Manu Kawana:** The *Kura Kaupapa* setting was very important. Where I come from, I had this traditional perspective. I had learned about the early missionaries, christianity and all that, but I have always been a traditional Māori. We were here before the missionaries arrived and I decided I wanted to stay on this *waka*<sup>5</sup> and paddle this *waka*. I have worked in other places where our language is the key as well, but specially at *Mana Tamariki* I had the opportunity to share the traditional knowledge with the *tamariki*, the children, and maintain all the traditional ceremonies and rituals. My 23 year old son was

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<sup>4</sup> A *Marae* is a traditional Māori communal space that serves social and religious purposes.

<sup>5</sup> A *waka* is a Māori traditional canoe.

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a student at *Mana Tamariki* and he now works for Māori television, in Auckland. He is going in that direction as well, working to maintain our language and culture. It is good to be able to see that the knowledge that you have imparted onto your family and children and whoever is something that is taken dearly and flourishes. That inspires me a lot more to continue my job of sharing our traditions, not only here but in several other *Wananga*, higher education places of learning as well. It has been a great journey and I am glad I am on this *waka*.

**Chang Whan:** Do you also work with the parents of the children who come to Mana Tamariki?

**Manu Kawana:** We don't run special sessions for the parents, but parents are always encouraged to participate and come and enjoy themselves at activities we do here, the traditional ceremonies in the garden and others.

### V – Dianne Pomare



**Picture 5 – Dianne Pomare**

Dianne Pomare is the principal at *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Nga Maungarongo*, a Māori school in Auckland, NZ. She has been involved in Māori education programs for many years.

**Marcus Maia:** *Kia Ora*, Dianne, can you tell us your story?

**Dianne Pomare:** I was a young girl back in the 1970's, when we started the big fight for *Te Reo* survival. At that time, I recall, there was not any Māori programs on television. There was one program on radio, maybe, and that was it. The only initiative concerning Māori education then was to get ahead the need for Māori to speak and write in English well. So, many of our parents were colonized. They didn't believe that *Te Reo* Māori was a benefit. *Pakeha* people in New Zealand would say that we should learn Mandarin, Japanese or Spanish, because those were languages worth studying. I recall once going to TV New Zealand with a group to ask for time for a Māori TV program and they asked us "what about other minority groups here?". They had no idea about the difference between languages which came from other countries and the Māori indigenous language.

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However, there was a great push from Māori activists, marches for land and also for culture and language. There were several groups protesting and, finally, in 1975 a petition for *Te Reo Māori* was taken to the government in Wellington. Also, at that time, there was a push starting towards *kohanga reo*. The *kohanga reo* movement actually started in Wellington in 1981. I was then living up north and we also started it there in 1983. My children went to *kohanga reo* as soon as it started. The nannies would come in and would feed *Te Reo* to the children and also to the parents. But they couldn't be at the schools all day and the government imposed conditions that they had to be involved from 9 to 3, if we were to get funding. That became problematic because the nannies could only stay until lunch time. I think you have to be very careful when you involve government funding in these things. On the one hand you get money, but on the other hand, you get conditions, which you may or may not like.



**Picture 6** - *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Ngā Maungarongo*, in Auckland, NZ.

**Marcus Maia:** What about *Kura Kaupapa*?

**Dianne Pomare:** The same happened with *Kura Kaupapa*. Now, fortunately we have just had a change of government here in New Zealand, and they will knock off these things called “national standards” that the previous conservative governments were trying to force us to do. Our *kura kaupapa* movement would resist to those. **Chang**

**Whan:** How many schools like yours are there in New Zealand?

**Dianne Pomare:** There are 54 *kura* schools in New Zealand. And there are other *kura* which are tribally based, about 15 of these. Then, there are schools which are bilingual units, but the best are the total immersion schools, I don't really believe in the bilingual schools.

**Chang Whan:** Do the non-Māori mainstream schools in New Zealand teach *Te Reo Māori*?

**Dianne Pomare:** They are not forced to. There was a project based on the Treaty of Waitangi, but it did not pass. Even though Māori is an official language it is not mandatory to teach it.

**Chang Whan:** And if someone who is not Māori wants to register their children here, would you accept them?

**Dianne Pomare:** Yes, of course. It is not about race or anything. If someone believes in our system, our philosophy, he is welcome. Recently, we have taken children from an American family living in Auckland. We have also once had children from Tonga, an island not too far from New Zealand.

**Marcus Maia:** Dianne, based on your experience, what advice could you give to indigenous peoples in Brazil who would like to develop their own language nest programs?

**Dianne Pomare:** Well, first of all, they need to control their land. If you own the land, you are half way there. The other thing is that you should always be aware of the environment. In our case, the sea and the forests, and probably for you too. We are lucky here in our school, because even though we are in an urban environment, we are close to the ocean and to green areas. Children should always have access to these natural areas, as their ancestors did. You should always be able to teach children things which are important to their culture and you have to think how you are going to do that.

**Chang Whan:** What is the language vitality situation here?

**Dianne Pomare:** Well, actually, the children speak *Te Reo* at the school, but not so much at home. Not all the parents speak it at home. There is a commitment that they are asked to make when they come in here, but they don't really follow it. So we are working with them so that they at least talk to their children in Māori for one hour a day. If we really want these children here to believe that *Te Reo* Māori is an important thing, then it cannot be just between 9:00h and 15:00h. When they go home, children should not have to translate everything that they did here in Māori to their parents in English. They shouldn't have to switch off one world and then go to another. That is not the case of those of us who belong to families who have been speaking Māori for three generations such as my own family. My children came here and they speak Māori, my grandchildren came here and they speak Māori. And I am told that if you want *Te Reo Māori* to survive, you need at least three generations speaking the language. I just came back from Fiji, last week. Fiji was also colonized by the British a long time ago, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and they only became independent in 1970. English is taught at their schools and yet among themselves they speak Fijian all the time. There, the Fijians are the majority of the population, there is still a huge number of the original people, while, here, the Māori is a minority. So we have to keep translating between Māori and English all the time. That is an artificial situation, but that is the only thing we can do. However, there are cases as my granddaughter. She studies here at this school and she only speaks Māori. **Chang Whan:** Really? She doesn't speak English?!

**Dianne Pomare:** Not really. And we encourage that. She speaks Māori fluently and we do not expose her to English very much. In our family, we don't expose children to English until they are four or five. This is the best way to keep the indigenous language really entrenched. And later, they are going to learn English anyway. It is everywhere, they are not going to lose English.

**Marcus Maia:** What about writing in English?

**Dianne Pomare:** So, writing could be problematic at spelling, but we do have English classes here.

**Marcia Nascimento:** What year do English classes start?

**Dianne Pomare:** English classes start when children are around 9 years old, at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Then they have English for two hours a week, that is all. I am an English teacher, as well as I teach in *Te Reo* and my philosophy is that we should do it, because it is not a problem, 99% of the children end up getting English as well. And those few who have to struggle to learn English, those will be the ones who have to struggle in Māori as well. So, we are very strict here in this *Kura* about not speaking English. There are other schools that teach Māori alongside English all the time. I do not believe in this approach. These bilingual classes do not work! They end up learning neither language properly. Total immersion in the indigenous language is the approach that really works. It has got to be all or nothing. That is why we do have to focus in teaching in Māori. In New Zealand, what you find sometimes is that even people who are very fluent in Māori tend to be lazy and speak English. English is so dominant here. People who could speak in Māori to each other tend to shift into English. It is a real struggle. It is a big challenge for us. You know, so much colonization.

**Marcia Nascimento:** This is a great challenge for us too, in Kaingang.

**Dianne Pomare:** How many people are you trying to help speak your language? You are talking about hundreds, thousands? Anyway, no matter how many, your main task is to get them to believe deep in their hearts that this is a good thing. There is no way your language will survive without that. This is the most important. They must believe that their native language is from the earth, from the sky, from the forests. Young people tend to take it for granted and it is our duty to remind them.

#### **VI – Kiriana Hakopa**

Kiriana was a student at *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Nga Maungarongo*, in Auckland, where she is now a teacher. She invited us to visit her school and left us this beautiful message and song which you can watch in the video.



**Vídeo: Kiriana Hakopa speaks and sings**

**<https://youtu.be/ntbp-QOAljM>**

### **VII – Final remarks**

The four interviews presented here should allow the reader to form a broad view of the language and culture revitalization efforts carried out in New Zealand during the past few decades. Toni Waho, Brenda Soutar, Manu Kawana and Dianne Pomare belong to the generation who took the challenge of language and culture maintenance, with the revolutionary passion, the “lunacy” as Toni Waho puts it, which made it possible to deter the extinction of the Maori language in Aotearoa, New Zealand. The emotion that transpires from the words and singing of Kiriana Hakopa, the young teacher who studied at the Kura Kaupapa in Auckland, is living proof that the fire of passion for Maori language and culture is well lit. It is our hope that this passion will inspire speakers of the many endangered languages in the world never to give up to fight for their language and culture and ultimately for the survival of diversity on earth. As Brenda Soutar says, it is a hard struggle, but how else would our children know that we can do it?



**Picture 7**



**Picture 8**

Marcia Nascimento, Marcus Maia and Chang Whan at *Mana Tamariki*, the Māori language nest and school in Palmerston North (picture 7). Authors with Kiriana Hakopa at *Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Nga Maungarongo*, in Auckland (Picture 8), October 2017.

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