

Karawhiua: Mobilizing own Māori Language Journey

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Abstract

Mobilizing the Māori language in Aotearoa is critical if the language is to thrive. An Indigenous ethnography approach is used to tell my personal and professional bicultural and bilingual experiences in teaching and learning. These lived Māori world views and experiences also illustrate how technology is transforming language opportunities.

Keywords: indigenous language; revitalization; communities

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Māori is the only Indigenous language to Aotearoa New Zealand. Like most Indigenous languages, the Māori language is a minority language in its own country (Hanemann, 2020). Even more alarming is the claim from Benton (2015) that “Māori is in grave danger of being eclipsed as the country’s second language.” Historically, the Māori language was a flourishing language and was spoken in various dialects throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. The effects of colonisation, assimilation, and urbanisation has actively deterred mobilizing the Māori language as a right for Māori and all Aotearoa New Zealand citizens.

Furthermore, Benton’s 1970s research findings on Māori communities showed the Māori language was in rapid decline and in danger of disappearing as more Māori parents were accepting English as the preferred language of communication (Benton, 1997). Māori language revitalization was critical to prevent the language from dying. In response, Māori leaders and communities asserted rangatiratanga (authority) to strive for change. They petitioned the Government and dreamed and designed strategies of innovation to nurture Māori language revitalization. Tuhakaraina and Dayman (2020, p. 92) describe some key drivers of innovation in Aotearoa: (1) Nga Tamatoa in 1970s challenged tertiary institutions to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi; (2) Te Ataarangi model, using cuisenaire rods was developed for language learning method with adults and whanau; and (3) Te Kohanga Reo, Māori language nest, were set up in 1982 to revitalise te reo me ōna tikanga Māori and to empower whānau development and management (2020, p. 92).

These innovations were a response by Māori for Māori to address historical failures of

government. To reclaim mobilization of the Indigenous language in domains of influence, education and media, Indigenous Māori asserted their political sovereignty to regain Indigenous rights to language, culture, identity in education.

The Māori language was rightfully recognized as an official language in 1987, a taonga (treasure), which was guaranteed protection under Te Tiriti o Waitangi / Treaty of Waitangi according to Kegan et al. (2011). The role of new technologies in promoting Māori language were critical in mobilizing language learners in the technology spaces. In the twenty-first century, digital technology is helping the revitalisation of te reo Māori. For example, Kupu is an app that translates objects into te reo Māori (Buchanan, 2019; Johnsen, 2020). Furthermore, increasing numbers of Māori people are using the Internet, listening to relatives, and attending hui instead of the classroom setting (O'Connor, 2021). There is some evidence that the Internet supports the acquisition of language and cultural knowledge. For example, Crystal and Swapna (2020) found that students improve language skills and cultural knowledge as a result of virtual interactions with native speakers. Technology is enhancing how learners are able to access language learning 'a tōna wā', meaning when the time is right for them, as Rocca (2018, p. 2) states, "anytime, anywhere."

Indigenous ethnography

According to Ellis (2004), indigenous ethnographies share a history of colonialism. Indigenous ethnography is the approach I use to permit my voice as an Indigenous person to be the character of my personal and professional experiences in teaching and learning te reo me ōna tikanga Māori (Māori language and Māori customs). These lived Māori world views and experiences also share how technology is transforming new opportunities to my role as pouako in tertiary education and my involvement in a government and community professional development called Te Ahu o te reo Māori (The future pathway of the Māori

language).

Indigenous knowledge and language in Te Kohanga Reo

The establishment of Te Kohanga Reo in 1982, was to “arrest the decline of Māori speaking people” (Kā’ai, 2004, p. 205). Māori whānau and communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand responded quickly to set up Māori language nests in support of revitalization of the Māori language. This movement has been a positive model of self-determination by Māori for Māori to strengthen Māori language, whānau involvement, accountability and wellbeing. More than 60,000 individuals have graduated from kohanga reo and have contributed to the revival of the language (Calman, n.d.). The movement marked 40 years on 12 April 2022.

Te Kohanga Reo is where my journey into a Māori worldview began. I was a young mother in my early twenties, on the mat with my two-year old daughter and the rest of the whānau, listening to the language and knowledge of my ancestors. Krashen’s “affective filter hypothesis” (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p. 37) is drawn on to explain my early memories of anxiety and moments of immobilization to acquire Māori language skills. However, we were socialised in to the kohanga reo learning environment surrounded by other parents, children, aunties, uncles and grandparents that helped to mitigate my barriers and allowed my language learning to take place.

Mobilizing te reo Māori was transmitted and influenced by kaumātua (elders) as the wisdom shared by native speakers. Kaumātua were critical in teaching and supporting the development of future generations of people, like myself, who had either limited or no knowledge of te reo Māori and cultural ways of doing things. Kaumātua conversed in the native language consistently to each other but would transition between Māori and English to

support us, the second language learners. Cultural values, aroha and manaakitanga, were illustrated naturally by kaumātua as they supported “nurturing relationships” (Mead, 2016, p. 33) to create a safe, caring, and positive place for knowledge and language learning to occur.

Whanaungatanga, another cultural value was experienced daily, is where all whānau took responsibility for each other. As a parent and learner, I was not just responsible for my child but all children as is traditional practice of whānau. The notion of whanaungatanga, according to Mead (2016, p. 32), claims that “whanaungatanga embraces whakapapa and focuses on relationships.” To promote whanaungatanga amongst the whānau, mihimihi, an introduction of ko wai au, who I am and my sense of whakapapa and belonging that connects me to people, place and things, was a valued learning custom. This daily ritual occurred every morning and involved oneness as the whole whānau gathered together on the whāriki (mat), inclusive of children, adults and kaumātua to take turns saying our whakapapa relationships. The listening and observing of each person saying mihimihi empowered me, and giving it a go ‘a tōku wā’ (in my time) was reassuring. Learning about my whakapapa meant learning about my grandparents’ names and where they were from. There were many conversations with my parents that helped me discover names and stories associated to my ancestors. My mother’s whakapapa connects me as tangata whenua, people of the land of Aotearoa. My ancestors arrived on the waka, Tākitimu and Kurahaupō. Tākitimu waka travelled and landed in various places throughout the length of Aotearoa. In the lower South Island, there are mountains named after the ancient waka Tākitimu. The waka Kurahaupō connects me to one of the iwi in Te Taihū, the top of the South Island.

On my father’s side, my ancestors arrived in Aotearoa on ships, not waka. My father explained that “his maternal grandmother was born on the ship called Arawa when sailing to New Zealand from England in the 1800s. Her given name, Arawa Husband Cullen. Arawa

was the name of the ship; Husband, the name of the Doctor who delivered her; and Cullen her family name. The name Arawa carries on in my whānau whakapapa.

The learning of mihimihi strengthened my sense of identity. Learning about my native culture makes me feel connected to my ancestors and ancestral landscape in the Hawkes Bay region, and it also bolsters my feeling of belonging to the area where I currently live. The concept tūrangawaewae is described as where my feet are located to place and people (Mead, 2016).

Karanga is a call of welcome, a customary practice of welcome onto the marae. Karanga is the role of kuia (elders) and women. It is the first voice to hear when being called onto the marae. I liken karanga as a medium of communication between the kaikaranga (callers) as they transmit information both physically and spiritually for the living and non-living.

Our day at kohanga would start with a karanga by our kuia (elder) to the whānau. This ritual would start outside, and by the time the three karanga were finished, we would arrive inside ready for the next ritual, karakia. Our kuia, aunty Rangiruhia Lucy Elkington, would begin by calling ‘nau mai, haere mai e te whānau’ (welcome, welcome family), and in response we called ‘karanga mai, karanga mai, karanga mai’ (call us, call us, call us). As learners of the art karanga, we would call in small groups, then move to taking individual turns at calling. We learned that the first karanga was to be about a call of welcome to the visitors or people of the marae. The second karanga was about the physical and spiritual connection between the living and non-living. The third karanga was about the purpose of the visit and to the whareniui (meeting house). Our kuia were visionary and empowering as they prepared us wahine (females) for the role of kaikaranga on the marae.

Another significance daily practice was the learning of a wide range of waiata (songs). According to Hemara, waiata are “important educative tools” (2000, p. 23) that tell the history, stories and events of whānau, hapū and iwi. We sang waiata called moteatea that were long verses of history and waiata to support welcoming people into the kohanga or the marae. The adults would relax on the whāriki and around the tamariki as they slept to sing these kinds of waiata. Contemporary waiata for tamariki included cultural tools, such as poi, tī rākau, haka, and actions songs with different rhythms and beats. Learning the Māori language through waiata helped my early pronunciation and confidence in a socialised setting.

Karakia are prayers that happened daily. Kaumātua would lead the karakia, and whānau mimicked the language patterns. Karakia kai (meal time prayers) were observed across meals demonstrating a respect for the food and where the food came from, Papatūānuku (mother earth). A cultural value that embraces the gifting of food is manaakitanga, hospitality of care to each other is paramount in te ao Māori. Other engagements of karakia happened when planting and gardening in Papatūānuku. Whānau going on trips into the ngahere (bush) or to the moana (sea). Karakia was observed when taking gifts from these domains. My experiences into these practices developed my cultural competence when transitioning into domains outside and inside the kohanga. From a linguistic perspective, karakia gave me language strategies to use in other contexts.

My time in Te Kohanga Reo was a treasured moment as I was indulged in my ancestors’ knowledge and language from kaumātua of our community. These rich experiences continue to guide my teaching practice today. I went on to become a kaitiaki and kaiako (Custodian and teacher) delivering the philosophy of the kohanga and the cultural knowledge and practices passed on to us from kaumātua. The enormous role and

responsibility to stay committed to the philosophy made us undertake early childhood training and kohanga reo training. Cassette tapes were popular tools in my early days of kohanga to help with my pronunciation of kupu and waiata away from kohanga. Compact discs emerged and then phone devices making learning of words and songs more readily available.

I stayed in the movement for twenty-five years, full of joyful opportunities and memories alongside many whānau, including my own four children and my eldest mokopuna. The philosophy created a safe place for whānau Māori to succeed and thrive in te ao Māori, Māori world view of values and beliefs. My work in Te Kohanga Reo is one of support as I took up a new teaching position in initial teacher education.

Indigenous knowledge and language in tertiary education

I moved from Te Kohanga Reo to my current tertiary position at Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood New Zealand (ECNZ) in 2007. ECNZ has more than 55 years of experience in teacher education, advocacy, and promotion of world-leading early childhood education. The tertiary provider specializes in teacher education, offering a range of diplomas, degrees, and postgraduate programs. All programs are taught primarily online. ECNZ programs reflect a commitment to bicultural practices that demonstrate Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), Māori culture and Māori language.

To promote Māori language learning, ECNZ designed He Pātaka Reo, a te reo Māori course. He Pātaka Reo has been designed with multimedia cultural materials, including videos, audio clips, quizzes, vocabulary lists, and templates. Students are required to engage in the language topics and then take their learning back into their early childhood settings to engage and encourage the use the Māori language. There are 18 language topics that students

engage in, and they complete tasks and submit for feedback from lecturers.

He Pātaka Reo is a requirement by the New Zealand Teaching Council as a means of monitoring the progression of all students' competency and confidence using te reo Māori across all initial teacher education programs. He Pātaka Reo is making language learning more accessible in the 21st century. The course demonstrates a positive reaction in exemplifying the Crown action, whakaako, where ECNZ is playing a "role in providing access to te reo Māori learning for adults which helps to build teacher capability in te reo Māori" (Te Kawanatanga o Aotearoa, 2019, p. 29). Moreover, in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership, educators are encouraged to use and promote te reo Māori me ngā tikanga Māori (Education Council, 2017).

Research shows that mobilizing learning language "anywhere, anytime" (Rocca, 2018, p. 2) enables learners to create their own learning environments. In my personal learning, I have found this slogan (anywhere, anytime) to be true. I learn effectively not only in the classroom but also outside of the classroom setting. Leading weekly Zoom hui to promote te reo Māori language enables learners to connect from their devices whether they are at home or away from home and in the car, train, or bus. Therefore, technology is "providing opportunities for more exposure and more practice, with learners feeling more in control and enjoying themselves in the process." (Rocca, 2018, p. 1).

Learning te reo Māori online has become a popular way of accessing learning of te reo Māori with apps such as Kupu o te Rā whereby a word a day is sent to one's email address. I find learning a new word a day is adding onto my vocabulary. Included in a word a day are sentences that challenge and support a higher level of learning. Additionally, Te aka Māori dictionary (Moorefield, n.d.) is an online dictionary and available as a hard text (McDonald & Moorfield, 2006). The website is one of my main dictionaries when I am

unsure if the kupu has a macron or am searching for a kupu. There are audio files to support how to pronounce words correctly.

Additionally, a new app called Panga is a Māori version of Wordle. Panga is described as “a very simple, brainteaser-style word game,” and since the launch of Panga, meaning riddle or puzzle, the game has been popular. Players have six attempts to guess the word. Challenges like Panga keeps my language learning interesting, and sometimes challenging (Donovan, 2022).

There is even a newly developed phone app called Kōrerorero which teaches beginner te reo Māori speakers how to use language in everyday situations such as getting up in the morning or making breakfast. The purpose of the application is to facilitate learning anywhere, anytime (Rocca, 2018). Hemi Kelly states that Kōrerorero helps to “breakdown that barrier of time” (cited in Johnsen, 2020) to travel to a classroom domain for learning. Mobilizing language learning of te reo Māori from devices, such as computers, handheld devices, etc, and learning language a tōna wā, in one’s preferred time, allows the language to develop and for language teaching to occur (Rocca, 2018).

ECNZ programs are primarily taught online. When Covid began to disrupt our daily lives, we were positioned well to carry on teaching and learning from the classroom platform. Our noho marae stay had to be adapted to a virtual noho marae. The virtual program enabled students and staff to come together online to demonstrate te reo Māori, discuss cultural customs, and hear from tangata whenua speakers to share knowledge about their iwi and cultural customs, education strategy and economical practices.

Te Rito Maioha Early Childhood prides commitment towards bicultural practices in the teaching programs and in the organization ethos. One example of active engagement to

promote bicultural and bilingual practices in the organization involves monthly wero. Wero are challenges, and the current wero is for te reo Māori to thrive as a living language across the eleven regional education centers and our national office. Wero are organized by each regional educational center to promote and engage staff in learning te reo me ōna tikanga Māori. Wero activities have been varied from learning karakia, whakataukī (proverbs), mihi and waiata (singing). Some wero have involved researching places of significance to tangata whenuatanga, places in our communities, as a way of getting to know about our tūrangawaewae or where our feet are planted. These learnings about our communities were shared in text and video to connect our Takiwā ako – Regional education centers. Another opportunity is for early childhood teaching teams and ECNZ staff to enroll in He Pātaka Reo course for professional learning and to develop and increase their confidence to use te reo Māori.

Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori – The future pathway of te reo Māori

Teacher mobilization of the Māori language and customs finds my participation in an exciting initiative within Te Taihū o te Waka – The Top of The South Island called Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori. The program is relevantly new to Te Taihū region. The delivery is a blend of face-to-face learning and online learning via video conferencing and a noho marae stay over. Teaching in a program whose curriculum is bound to Te Taihū iwi (Māori people) cultural narratives and language is breath-taking. These are significant changes for Te Taihū iwi to be the leading parties in ensuring local-level language revitalization in this program. The program is offered to all Te Taihū education principals, teachers, teacher aids and administrators.

Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori is a program funded by Te Tāhuhu o Te Mātauranga (Ministry of Education) to develop teacher competency in te reo Māori (specifically

pronunciation and use of te reo Māori), tikanga Māori and improved understanding of local stories.

The report Evaluation of Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori findings showed that the program is more than a te reo Māori program. It is also an opportunity for teachers to engage and understand a different worldview, to engage in cultural practices, narratives and histories relevant to Aotearoa and to the system that supports the education of all students. The program has enabled teachers with different skills and knowledge, from different schools, and from different sectors to come together in a safe place to learn. The program has challenged, overwhelmed, invigorated, and inspired. Participants agreed that Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori has added real value to them and the tamariki they teach, and to see the training come to an end would be a lost opportunity to build on the momentum Te Ahu o Te Reo Māori has created (Smith et al., 2020).

Conclusion

In conclusion, my humble beginnings to participate in Te Kohanga Reo has led me on a personal and professional journey of success in te ao Māori, proficient levels in speaking, listening, reading and writing of the Māori language and to be competent to provide high-quality Māori language education and professional development to current and future teachers in Taihu and across Aotearoa. The challenge is to make sure local-level language revitalization in Te Taihu communities have access to Māori language technology and to ensure that indigenous people are driving the Māori language revitalization movement.

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