



E tipu e rea Me pehea tou ao

By Na Tainui Stephens

I te tuatahi me mihi kau ake ahau ki a ngai tatou e tamara ma. Tena koutou. Tena ano tatou i roto i nga tini ahuatanga o te wa. Tena ra tatou e kopikopiko haere nei i te motu, e kimi haere nei i te mea huna e kia nei te iti kahurangi. No reira kia ora mai ano tatou.

Ko tetahi o nga korero onamata e penei ana "Korerotia ko wai ratou". Ka mutu koiane ko tetahi tu ahua e tihae ake nei i o tatou whatumanawa, e huri haere nei hoki i te hinengaro o tena o tena o tatou.

Ae ra, te takitini o tatou he Maori. Ahakoa ra ko te ahua o te kiri mau tonu, ko te kori o te tinana mau tonu, ko te ahua o te reo e ngaro haere ana i a tatou. He aha i penei ai?

Mai ano i te timatanga o te noho tahi o Tauwi me taua me te Maori, ka tukinotia to tatou reo. E tino mohio ana tatou mo nga tamariki nohinohi i a ratou i korero Maori kei te kura. Kua patua a ratou ringa ki te taura. Ana, ko te korero ke a nga pakeke me nga kaumatua — Pena ka tae mai te wa a te Pakeha he ao hou tenei, he ao rereke. Kia waihotia nga mea Maori i muri.

Penei tonu te whakaaro heke iho nei ki tenei whakapaparanga. Otira no taku hoa wahine e kopu ana kua whakaaro au kia mohio ai ta maua hua ki tona reo matua. He rite pu tenei whakaaro oku ki o maua tini hoa. Engari he huarahi uaua rawa tenei, ehara i te ngawari. Ka whanau mai ta maua tamaiti ka nui rawa nga wawata mona. Me pehea tana tu i roto i tenei ao pohauhau? Na tatou ano tenei ao, ma tatou hoki e

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hanga te ao ma nga reanga kahore ano kia puta mai. Ka mihi whanui ahau ki nga pepi katoa o te motu. Haere mai.

My son usually wakes up early in the mornings. When I go into his room to pick him up out of his cot he looks up at me and says "Hello". When I leave for work he says "Byebye". He is barely a year and a half old and smiles a lot when he talks to his Dad and experiments with new wet and dry sounds. Yet every time his eyes twinkle and his tiny voice says hello or byebye; I hurt a little inside. Since he entered this world I have spoken what Maori I know to him constantly. He attends a Kohanga Reo. He laps up little bedtime stories in Maori and in fact demands them. His first clear words however are English ones. It is not a matter of seeking and placing blame or fault. This is a situation which I would suppose is going to face many young parents who wish for their children a chance to know "Who they are!" I am a little disillusioned and feel that maybe some good can come from putting to paper some personal experiences. Maybe others will recognise them.

When folk hear me speaking Maori to my son they are often intrigued. When at my command he shows them his pito or arero they are delighted. They invariably express the opinion that he will speak Maori fluently by the time he attends school. Quite apart from recognising my present limitations I have just realised, (and painfully) that no children of mine are going to speak Maori fluently unless some attitudes that we possess are looked at carefully.

I am one of many who have discovered what my taha Maori means, and the potential it holds. Several years ago I started to learn the language and was told then that it is an easy language to learn. I do not believe for one minute that it is. Simply saying things in Maori may not be too hard. The difficult thing however is that you also have to "think Maori" before you can "speak Maori". Maori unlike some languages was conceived in the mind and born on the mouth rather than on paper. I feel that the current emphasis on books needs to be diverted to some extent, and focused on to the people from whence it came. This is a more natural way of learning. Institute it and perhaps Maori may be as "easy to learn" as some say. At present you can be discouraged by learning from a book and not being understood.

Probably too, the longer one delays learning the language, the harder it becomes to do so. The changes of adolescence and the responsibilities of parenthood are powerful reasons to dissuade one from learning the language. We need to be aware though that it takes only a handful of generations for any tongue to fall from everyday use to demise.

I have often been told to slow down

by my peers and elders as I pursue Te Reo and "things Maori" in general. Zealous people like me are, I suspect, like that out of a sense of anxiety rather than arrogance; worry for nga taonga a nga Tupuna rather than superficial haste. Recognising that to some, the clock on the Maori day is winding slowly down, many of us are trying to wind it up again, hard. While still others are looking to buy a new model, maybe a digital one! I personally like the old-style clock, but it requires effort rather than quartz to keep it ticking.

If you have been brought up without something which is later discovered, there may often be a need to "make up for lost time". This has strengthened my resolve for our children to know not just their taha Pakeha, but their taha Maori. The children will be the guardians of whatever language we bequeath them. Unfortunately we the teachers are often lacking in resources ourselves. The resolve then becomes obligation, then: responsibility.

Much has been said, written, and debated about concerning the Kohanga Reo. There are, as is to be expected, some administrative difficulties and it is a pity that some are claiming both here and overseas that the language nests are a success. They are not that yet, although the potential is certainly there.

I sincerely feel that one of the main "target" groups of the Kohanga Reo should be the parents. While there are many who whole-heartedly support their children in learning Maori; there are those parents who view the Kohanga as being merely a convenient and relatively inexpensive child care facility.

Parents have, as far as the language is concerned, a responsibility to create a Maori "atmosphere" outside Kohanga hours. This support is vital to a child's language acquisition. Maori cannot and will not be learnt solely between the weekday hours of 8.00am and 5.00pm. It requires a total commitment that also needs balance lest Maori speaking children are made to feel embarrassed if their friends or relations (or parents!) do not understand them. To achieve this degree of commitment, parents really need to learn at least some of the basics of the language. We could help by example and when seeing our children climb onto the table say "Heke iho!" or "Kaua e mahi pena!". This would be somewhat preferable to: "Hey you fellas get off that bloody table!!" The concept of Te Kohanga Reo does not, I believe, end with paying the weekly fees.

We also need to appreciate that those children who do learn to speak Maori are going to form an elite group whether they like it or not. There are still so many young Maori people who are missing out. Maybe the fee is just out of the reach of the budget, or maybe