

REDEFINING THE POLITICS OVER ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE RENEWAL: MAORI LANGUAGE PRESCHOOLS AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT/RESUME

The use of the Maori language gradually declined in New Zealand. In response, Maori language immersion preschools have developed. These have become an instrument in changing the nature of Maori-government relations, as well as being a major source of shaping Maori consciousness in recent years. The author concluded with an examination of the implications of aboriginal language preschools for Native people in Canada.

L'emploi de la langue des Maori a peu à peu baissé en Nouvelle-Zélande. D'autre part, des garderies d'immersion en langue Maori se sont développées. Celles-ci sont devenues un moyen de modifier le nature des rapports Maori-Gouvernement, ainsi qu'une source majeure de modeler la prise de conscience chez les Maori dans les années récentes. L'auteur a conclu en examinant les implications des garderies en langue aborigène pour les autochtones au Canada.

Introduction

Aboriginal peoples throughout the world have long struggled to avert the continued decline of their sociocultural status (see Cornell, 1984; Weaver, 1983a; Little Bear et al, 1984; Dyck, 1985).¹ Issues related to physical and cultural preservation, as well as the elimination of discriminatory statutes and practices, have taken precedent in shaping the dynamics of these struggles. But objectives which once seemed important to the cause have been now displaced by increasingly assertive demands. No longer are indigenous populations content with the mere attainment of formal equality or token acknowledgement of their cultural distinctiveness. Nor are they willing to accept a view of their cultural heritage as a "social problem", at odds with the imperatives of contemporary existence. What has been proposed instead is the entrenchment of aboriginal cultural and socioeconomic rights as consistent with their indigenous status. Commensurate with this drive for sociocultural self-determination are concerted attempts at reviving an indigenous language base among an increasingly deculturated aboriginal youth. Perpetuation of this base is perceived not only as crucial for sustaining aboriginal identity and cultural distinctiveness, but also to be indispensable in facilitating a positive self-image and subsequent career success. Few would dispute that the concept of aboriginal language retention entails nothing less than a fundamental shift at the policy level. Yet, in the face of assimilationist pressures to the contrary, innovative programs for language maintenance and promotion have been proposed by aboriginal leaders to arrest this decline.

Such a scenario has been replicated in Canada and New Zealand. The aboriginal population in these countries has witnessed a steady deterioration of their language as a medium of everyday communication, especially among children and young adults. But in recent years, efforts from curriculum modifications to local improvisations have been implemented to reverse this historical decline. Nowhere is this more evident than in New Zealand where the Maori population in conjunction with the Maori Affairs Department has taken the initiative to ensure survival of the threatened indigenous language. First and foremost among these initiatives is the promotion of Maori language immersion preschools known as Te Kohanga Reo. Not only has this experiment in language retention exerted a notable impact in reshaping the content of Maori aspirations, but also evident is a profound influence in redefining the direction of New Zealand's emergent biculturalism. That the Kohanga Reo is widely regarded as reflecting and reinforcing changes within the realm of Maori-government relations is beyond contention. What perhaps should elicit some debate is the extent to which

the principle of aboriginal language immersion preschools may be applied as a strategy of language reclamation in Canada.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the concept of Kohanga Reo as an agent of social change, and assess its significance for redefining the relational status of the New Zealand Maori. Maori language preschools are shown to have emerged as a consequence of various political and social forces for reversing the historical exclusion of *te reo Maori* ("Maori language") as a tool of communication and symbol of cultural distinctiveness. Also demonstrated is the role of the Kohanga Reo in politicizing Maori assertiveness from a concern with the principle of *Tu Tangata* ("standing tall"), to an endorsement of *tangata whenua o aotearoa* ("indigenous peoples of the land"). That this innovative experiment is already of formidable influence in redefining Maori-government relations, and possesses considerable implications not only for New Zealand's Maori policy, but perhaps also for Indian policy in Canada, constitutes a focal feature of this paper. The study itself is divided into four sections: The first provides a necessary historical background in leading to the establishment of Kohanga Reo. Various social forces, from a groundswell of Maori nationalism on the one hand, to government response in light of diverse political and economic pressures on the other, are suggested to have prepared the way for its appearance. The second section deals with the formal properties of the Kohanga such as objectives, content, and organizational structure. Emphasis here is on the involvement of the local community and promotion of Maori cultural values in fostering a distinctive operating style. The third section considers the impact of the Kohanga upon the Maori community for reshaping the content of contemporary Maori aspirations. Also examined are its implications as an instrument of social change in revising the policy agenda upon which Maori-government relations are structured. The fourth and final section looks at the applicability of the Kohanga Reo concept to Canada. Native people in Canada have also experienced a loss of indigenous language competence, but now are prepared to reassert their language heritage as part of a commitment to collective self-determination through the exercise of self-government. To what extent a system similar to Kohanga Reo can be transferred to an entirely different context is open to conjecture, dependent as it is on a number of preconditions which need to be addressed.

Part I - Historical Background: From Assimilation To Tu Tangata

Historically the various tribes collectively known as the Maori of New Zealand represented the indigenous inhabitants of Aotearoa. For nearly 1,000 years the Maori constituted the undisputed occupants of this land. Foraging and horticultural skills served to sustain a highly competitive

society organized around relatively self-sufficient villages (*hapu*) of extended families (*whanau*) and defined by the communal principles of descent and territory (Metge, 1976). But following prolonged contact with European settlers (*Pakeha*) after 1840, the *mana* ("power") of the Maori began to deteriorate. Pakeha designs upon Maori land and passage of laws to expedite the alienation of this land (Native Land Acts of 1865, 1871) combined with the imposition of compulsory education (Native Schools Act 1871) to undermine the cultural basis of Maori society. Attempts by both the Young Maori Party at the turn of the century and the First Labour Government of 1935 contributed to some improvements in the general living conditions (Orange, 1977). Similar efforts by a reconstituted Department of Maori Affairs bolstered socioeconomic advancement to a limited degree after the Second World War. Yet the gap between Maori and Pakeha began to widen, particularly with the wholesale movement of a youthful Maori population into the cities during the 1960's. Together with growing international concern over civil and human rights in general, and in light of the increased visibility of the Maori "problem", the image of New Zealand as a racial paradise became slightly tarnished.

From the inception of systematic colonization in 1840 until now, the Maori have been often regarded as a "social problem" or as "having problems" in need of solution. Initial Maori policy revolved about an inclination to protect Maori interests, without ever losing sight of the obligation to assimilate them for the greater good of the colony (Ward, 1974). For as long as the Maori were defined as a political "problem" whose solution required their assimilation into the political fold, government intervention was kept to a minimum. But circumstances arising from events related to the Great Depression and the Second World War contributed to political awareness of government responsibility to assist the Maori. Once the Maori became politically identified as an economic "problem" (Love, 1977), the role of the Department's Social Welfare division expanded in size and scope. Yet by the late 1970's it was obvious neither integration as official policy nor massive government spending had brought about the anticipated socioeconomic advancement of the Maori. If anything, they as a group fell even further behind when measured along the indices of employment, education, health and offending (National Party's position paper on Maori Affairs, 1981; Report, *Race Against Time*, 1982). Worse still, the continued erosion of their land, language and cultural identity threatened to further deprive the Maori of their distinctiveness as the indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand (*tangata whenua o aotearoa*).

Nowhere was the social irrelevance of Maoridom as evident than in the decline of the language as a tool of daily communication. Following the Land

Wars of 1860-1865 and the imposition of settler hegemony, English emerged as the sole language of instruction at school. As such this was consistent with colonization processes elsewhere which also sought to reinforce domination through imposition of a foreign language (Kramarae, 1984). Te reo Maori was subsequently downgraded to the status of a rural folk language for use at home and around ceremonial occasions (Dewes, 1968). Attitudes to Maori were typified by one School Inspector who stated in 1858:

I consider that too much stress cannot be laid upon the acquirement of the English language. I believe civilization cannot be advanced beyond a very short stage through the means of the aboriginal tongue. The Maori tongue sufficed for the requirements of a barbarous race, but apparently would serve for a little more (quoted in Bird, 1930).

Because of such pressures - from benign neglect to outright repression - the use of Maori plummeted during the twentieth century as this table from Biggs (1972) illustrates:

Knowledge of Maori language among Maori schoolchildren			
	Percent speaking Maori	Percent Understanding Maori	
1913	90%	-	
1923	80%	-	
1950	55%	79%	
1953-58	26%	62%	

Notwithstanding limited concessions at the curriculum level from the 1930's onward (Barrington, 1970), the status of *te reo Maori* decreased dramatically (Benton, 1981). The language by the late 1970's was in danger of becoming extinct as a channel for everyday communication since fluency was restricted to a small number of speakers (about 70,000 out of a total population of 325,000), many of them middle aged or elderly and resident of rural hamlets (Reedy, 1982). The vast majority of Maori youths were growing up with little or no knowledge of their linguistic or cultural heritage. Of 1,302 schoolchildren sampled in the Auckland suburb of Manukau City by Richard Benton (1979), only 28 could speak competent Maori. Even the expansion of the preschool concept among Maori parents following publication of the Hunn Report in 1961 did little to enhance youth exposure to *te reo Maori*. Most of the preschools, including those controlled by Maori interests, were

conducted entirely in English in an effort to compensate Maori children for their alleged deficiencies (McDonald, 1973). Yet despite the efforts of conventional preschools,² Maori children continued to perform poorly in school when compared to the non-Maori population. At the same time, many lost any ability to relate to their cultural heritage beyond some vague attachment instilled by parents and the media and confirmed by their exclusion from the mainstream. The conclusion was obvious: although Maori continued to retain an emotive force in defining Maoritanga (Biggs, 1972), the viability of Maori as a language of daily intercourse could not be guaranteed without a comprehensive program of reform (Smith, 1981). Alarmed at the repercussions of this loss among Maori youth, as well as by their inability to perform competitively throughout society, Maori leaders began to exert pressure on the government through the Department of Maori Affairs to avert further damage.

Towards the end of the 1970's, Maori protest over their subordinate status in society had erupted into a series of disturbances at Bastion Point, Raglan and Waitangi. Increasingly Maori activism revolved about fundamental issues related to aboriginal rights (*tangata whenua o aotearoa*), Maori self-determination (*mana Maori motuhake*), and the attainment of institutional sovereignty (*rangatiratanga*). Political responses did not take long to materialize. Embarrassed at the prospect of undermining the legitimacy of New Zealand's race relations programs, the government reconsidered its approach to Maori affairs. Out of political necessity emerged a policy of multiculturalism, aimed at defusing Maori militancy over the hitherto unquestioned assumptions behind New Zealand's monocultural framework (Fleras, 1984b). This commitment to defuse activist pressure bore tangible fruit with the government's decision to reform both Maori policy and its administrative apparatus, the Department of Maori Affairs (Report, the Community Services, 1977).

In June of 1978, the Permanent Head of the Maori Affairs Department, Mr. Kara Puketapu, unveiled his Tu Tangata ("standing tall") philosophy as a blueprint for future Maori-government relations (Puketapu, 1982). Tu Tangata sought to bring about the reemergence of the Maori as a proud people willing to "stand tall" and capable of doing so if given the proper encouragement and resources. Promotion of socioeconomic equality through local developmental programs lay at the heart of Tu Tangata (Fleras, 1984a). But unlike earlier policies which conflated equality with cultural conformity, Tu Tangata advocated retention of Maori cultural values as crucial to Maori advancement and self-definition. Tu Tangata promoted the validity of certain customary values on the assumption that uncertainty over cultural identity

contributed to the poor showing of Maori at schools and in the marketplace. The cultural basis of Maori society was depicted not as a problem for the government to solve but as a source of untapped energy which, if handled correctly, enhanced the well-being of the entire society (Memo, Department of Maori Affairs, January 1981). By focusing on the positive virtues of Maoritanga (Maori culture), Tu Tangata hoped to establish the administrative framework for the attainment of Maori self-determination along all points of the social, economic, and cultural continuum (Fleras, 1985a).

Numerous programs under the blanket of Tu Tangata appeared, reflecting an inclination toward community development through local projects of self-determination. Included in this list were homework centres for Maori secondary pupils, vocational and trade training projects for school leavers, and rural cottage industries. Of these, however, few have captured the ethos of Tu Tangata as accurately as the introduction of Maori language preschools in 1982 known as Te Kohanga Reo. These immersion centres, based on the principles of *whanau* (Maori extended family values) and conducted entirely in Maori, typified the Department's commitment to sociocultural growth. At the same time, political endorsement of Kohanga Reo reconfirmed government acceptance of biculturalism as a potential basis for New Zealand policy. Only by placing the Kohanga against this historical background of an expanding Maori assertiveness, coupled with the entrenchment of Tu Tangata as government policy and administration, are there grounds for understanding the origins, rationale, and development of Maori language preschools.

Part 2 - Te Kohanga Reo: Objectives, Operating Style And Organizational Structure

Ko te reo te mauri o te tangata.

Language is the essence of human existence.

Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Maori

The language is the life principle of Maori vitality.

The Kohanga Reo can be analyzed at varying levels of interpretation. At one level it represents a kind of childcare centre which fuses together the structural format of preschool and day care, and combines them with a Maori style of operation.³ Maori speech is employed exclusively as the medium of verbal interaction while a Maori family setting (*whanau*) provides a healthy, stimulating atmosphere for enculturation of Maori cultural values. This exclusive reliance on Maori language and an extended family tradition is aimed primarily at producing bilingual and bicultural individuals who pos-

sess the confidence and skills to achieve success in either world. At another level is the prospect of Kohanga Reo in reclaiming te reo Maori from its perilous position and returning it to a rightful place in New Zealand society. Taken to even a higher level of abstraction, the Kohanga proclaims nothing less than the rebirth of the Maori nation as an equal but separate component within a framework of emergent biculturalism. Each of the latter two interpretations will be discussed shortly; first, however, a brief description of its objectives, structure, and style in order.

1. Objectives and Goals.

The Kohanga Reo is characterized by a diverse set of objectives (kaupapa) and goals (take), not all of which are consistent with each other or easy to articulate. Promotion of te reo Maori is without doubt the most explicitly cited objective. Official definitions point to the Kohanga as one of several attempts to rescue the language from that of irrelevance, to one which is operative in everyday interaction. To facilitate attainment of this objective, children are immersed within a controlled environment in hopes of focusing attention on those who are sufficiently malleable and receptive to intensive stimulation. There is a total reliance on the use of Maori as a medium of instruction: children are spoken to in Maori, they are expected to respond in Maori, and daily activities are arranged to maximize exposure to te taha Maori (the Maori side). Parents too are encouraged to take advantage of the momentum created at the centre by speaking in Maori at home to their children.

A number of related goals can also be discerned. One of these is the concept of Kohanga as a childcare centre whose role is to assist Maori parents in dealing with the pressures of modern society. That Maori parents have fared poorly in coping with the exigencies of urban society is widely known. A respected Maori elder writes:

It is a common fact that the urban scene becomes a nightmare for the solo parent. Hence you have a situation in many cities where young mothers are imprisoned in the impersonal and lonely constraints of the concrete jungle. That they never even get to meet other women of the same situation or older women who may add another dimension to their lives is an accepted fact. What we now have with the rise of TKR are situations where women can meet each other in a child care situation, a whanau situation and very often a cultural situation. So immediately you place TKR in the midst of the impersonal cold concrete city suddenly you have a changed situation. You see when people

come together under a motivation that springs from their children and their culture, we have something that is meaningful, positive and totally creative (John Rangihau, Paper delivered to the Te Kohanga Reo National Conference, Ngaruawahia Marae, January 1984).

Only by providing reliable day care facilities are Maori parents allowed the option to engage in full time employment without neglect to the physical or social well-being of their children. Also important - at least in the minds of numerous Maori parents - is the promotion of the Kohanga as a kind of compensatory education for Maori children. Given the poor scholastic performance of Maori students in the past, the Kohanga is promulgated as an alternative strategy for ensuring verbal and intellectual enrichment at the preschool level (Memo for the Cabinet Committee on Expenditure, 12 April 1983). Other objectives related to the practical aspects of the Kohanga Reo as childcare cannot be discounted. What is manifest, therefore, are diverse formal and informal objectives. Formal objectives revolve about the need to provide a balanced development for Maori children, and to assist them in coping with a modern context without rejecting their cultural identity in the process (Report, Te Kohanga Reo: National Review, 1982/1983). Informal goals range from the self-interest of parents on the one hand, to varying claims by Maori activists and government authorities on the other. Together these appeal to a wide cross-section of the New Zealand community, thereby ensuring a broadly-based support for the principle of language immersion preschools.

2. Structure and Operations.

The organizational structure of the Kohanga system embodies a hybrid of principles culled from conventional varieties of preschool and childcare centres. Certain regulations common to all preschool centres including rules about nourishment, sanitation, and supervision, are enforced to ensure adequate facilities for the care and supervision of children. To save on costs and to augment the proper atmosphere, most Kohanga centres are located at a Maori-owned premise such as a marae (Maori ceremonial complex) or, less frequently, at community centres or private homes (Interim Report on Te Kohanga Reo, 31 October 1983). The personnel of any Kohanga comprise of paid supervisor(s) and a voluntary sector of interested parents, grandparents and children. All supervisors or kaitiaki (servant of the people) are selected on the strength of their ability to speak Maori, and to relate to a diversity of people from children to visiting dignitaries. The voluntary input

is crucial to the operation of the Kohanga. Parents and grandparents are encouraged to become involved as part of their contribution toward the revival of te reo Maori. Some assume an active role in looking after children, whereas others prefer to serve in a variety of supplementary roles. This interactive milieu of parents, children and grandparents is perceived as critical not only in reconciling the values of home and preschool, but similarly in bridging the gap between generations through extended participation (see also CERL, 1977).

Each Kohanga centre is expected to produce and follow a basic daily routine which mixes formal sessions of learning with play and rest. Teaching sessions are kept as practical as possible: they focus on language learning through various repetitive actions in song, play and instruction. Prayers are conducted throughout the day to reinforce the spiritual element of Maoritanga. Induction of personal discipline and respect for elders is likewise important in complementing acquired habits such as paying attention, following instructions and learning to get along with others. To provide the optimal conditions for language learning, most Kohanga centres try to cultivate as natural an environment as possible. Educational aids and equipment are generally downplayed in favour of natural or spontaneous programs that arise at any given situation. Supervisors are not against the use of gadgets and educational aids (toys, blocks and brushes) per se, but only if these can be integrated into the overall program of language learning. Formal methods of teaching language are eschewed in favour of learning through exposure and repetition in songs, conversations, prayers and playing. One Maori parent stated that "the kids aren't taught how to speak Maori. They just sit around and listen to it and their little minds stretch and take it all in". Another Kohanga coordinator commented: "We aren't in the business of teaching. No, we are in the business to provide an environment where learning can take place naturally". It should be noted that, in contrast to earlier perspectives on equipment and teaching, the recent shift to sophisticated technology such as computers and video cassettes constitutes somewhat of a departure (Personal Communications, 23 June 1986).

Related to this concept of "indigenizing" the Kohanga Reo is the commitment to incorporate Maori cultural values whenever possible. Of the diverse values endorsed by the program, none is promoted as strongly as the philosophy of an extended family setting (whanau). The term whanau encompasses an expanding matrix of values revolving about related, but situationally diverse, set of meanings. When referring to the Kohanga, whanau is employed in two meaningful senses: first, it conveys the idea of a traditional extended family arrangement wherein children were socialized in an environment surrounded by the presence of grandparents, relatives

and other children. Second, the concept of whanau may be extended to include a cluster of images or values such as those normally associated with domesticity, including the virtues of aroha (caring, sharing and empathy), rangimarie (peacefulness), and manaaki (kindness). Whenever both meanings are combined, the image of a Kohanga as a whanau centre is a powerful one which acknowledges the supportive nature of the extended family as opposed to the fragmentation generated by the nuclear unit (Report, IPI Conference, 1981). This passage from the Department's handbook on the Kohanga Reo published in 1982 highlighted the inseparability of the whanau and te reo Maori philosophies:

The key to tKR is whanau. The tKR programme is designed to stimulate the growth of Maori whanau centres which can in turn offer the best environment possible for their children. It is a place where the Maori language will prevail and where love and care spring from the whanau. These centres can be in many places such as homes, maraes, churches, factories, offices, kokiri centres and the like. It is simply any place where the whanau Maori can operate with its natural and effective style.

The day to day administration and long term planning of each Kohanga belongs to a parent-controlled managing committee. This managing committee of locally recruited persons is primarily responsible for issues such as budgeting and programming. In keeping with its Tu Tangata philosophy of local development through self-reliance, the Maori Affairs Department has tried to minimize its involvement at this level. Departmental community officers are expected to maintain a degree of contact to be sure, yet always allowing each language nest to select a line of development consistent with the strengths of the local community. On a national level, there exists a Te Kohanga Reo Trust Body composed of the Chairperson of the Maori Education Foundation, the Secretary for Maori Affairs (or his appointment), a senior executive officer from the Department, as well as diverse personnel recruited from government bodies and the community. This body is responsible for monitoring the system's overall growth to ensure a common set of administrative standards and minimal standards of quality control. The Trust also acts on behalf of the organization in making submissions to the government and state agencies for financial or political support. Recent moves by the Trust to introduce a culturally relevant training program for supervisors - thus imposing Maori criteria for licensing purposes - (Kohanga Trust meeting, 31 January 1984), is proof of its determination to control the autonomy and survival of the Kohanga system.

Part 3 - The Impact And Implications Of Kohanga Reo: Maori And Government Perspectives

The impact of the Kohanga Reo is best assessed by reference to statistical data. The first language nest appeared on April 13, 1982 in the Wellington suburb of Wainuiomata; by December of that year, 54 centres had arisen throughout all of New Zealand with a total enrolment of nearly 900 children. Two years after establishment of the first Kohanga, there existed 262 centres and another 40 were in various stages of completion. Enrolments totalled nearly 16 children per centre with an average age of 3.34 years (Interim Report on the Kohanga Reo, 31 October 1983). Approximately 6 volunteers as well as an extensive network of community supporters complemented the role of paid supervisors (1.6 per centre). By the end of the fourth year of operation, 448 full operating centres had been instituted, with the prospect of another 500 no longer as remote as once thought (Tu Tangata News Magazine, April/May 1986). On the basis of this exceptional growth, it was evident the Kohanga had struck a responsive chord among Maori sectors, as well as within policy-making circles. To be sure, community-based efforts to promote the learning of Maori among schoolchildren and adults had prevailed earlier. These included among others, bilingual schools in Ruatoki, immersion classes at Wellington Polytechnic, and Maori Tribal Language Boards. Such innovations, however, failed to capitalize on the enormous plasticity of young children; nor did they duplicate the natural context in which language learning occurred. But the Kohanga Reo, by taking advantage of certain political and social trends, hoped to circumvent the limitations of earlier efforts at language preservation and to institute a novel approach at the preschool level instead.

Maori Responses: Language as Power, Power as Language

Urban Maoris at present are precariously balanced between seemingly contradictory demands inherent within modern existence. On the one hand is a desire for the attainment of social equality and economic parity. On the other an increasing number are finely attuned to their cultural legacy, unwilling to sacrifice this commitment in exchange for mainstream conformity. It is not that the Maori wish to preserve their cultural heritage in amber for the edification of nationalists or blandishments of the tourist trade. Quite the reverse, they want to consolidate a unique cultural identity based on the retention of selective patterns, one of the most important being te reo Maori (see Gans, 1979). This preoccupation with language is understandable: not only does their language represent a form of mutually satisfying communication but, taken at its most basic level, it encapsulates the very essence of

Maoriness and Maori cultural identity. To the extent the Kohanga Reo is involved in questions of power, let alone the reconstruction of an appropriate social reality, the concept of Maori language promotion is clearly a provocative one.

Acceptability of the Kohanga is attributable to various reasons. Diverse Maori sectors are in general agreement with the principles of the program, although each has justified its support on different grounds, thereby leaving the system open to diverse interpretations. For some, the promise of salvaging the language as a means of cultural expression is strongly attractive. For others, the emergence of language nests is endorsed as drawing the urban community closer together, instilling a sense of "belonging" or "groupness" through mutually shared activity. Still others find the system itself a potent symbol of Maori pride and vitality. As a living exercise in Maori control over the destiny of their language and children, the scheme allows Maori parents to exercise a sense of involvement without having to endure unwarranted interference from the state. Also evident is a desire by the Maori people to "stand tall" and overcome adversity by producing a generation of bilingual and bicultural children who are capable of engagement in the Maori and Pakeha world. The ability of children to express themselves in Maori is seen as stimulating a pride of race, a growth of personality or character, and enhancement of a positive self-image. Attraction is further enhanced by reports of success in expanding the language horizons of Maori children (Report to the Cabinet Committee on Expenditure, 25 January 1984; also, *Tu Tangata Magazine*, August/September 1984). That most children following an initial period of adjustment appear to acquire some facility to sing in Maori, to pray, to count, to name objects and to respond correctly to questions and instructions (see *Tu Tangata News Magazine*, August/September 1984), is embraced as a hopeful sign.⁴

Widespread approval of the Kohanga Reo concept is reflective also of changes in Maori perception of their political status.⁵ There is little doubt the Maori are entering a new era in redefining their ongoing relationship with the government. Whether in terms of socioeconomic advancement through cultural preservation (*tu tangata*) or by way of aboriginal nationalism (*tangata whenua*), the debate over power-sharing is increasingly manifest at the level of cultural politics. With this ascendancy of an expanding cultural assertiveness, Maori parents have taken a noticeable interest in retaining Maori along all points of the communicative continuum. No longer are they content to sit back and passively witness the decline of their language heritage. Nor will they collude with educational authorities to enforce the primacy of English language instruction at school. Instead, urban parents - many of them incapable of speaking Maori - are increasingly anxious to entrench

te reo Maori as an integral component of the education agenda. Such a perspective is consistent with the growing realization that, although competence in English remains essential for educational or employment success, the ability to speak Maori will not necessarily interfere with career prospects. In marked contrast to the past when socioeconomic advancement revolved about the promotion of Pakeha credentials, Maoritanga is no longer devalued as an impediment to success. It is promoted instead as a marketable asset which confers a competitive advantage to those with bilingual competence - especially with the appointment of qualified Maori personnel at middle and upper management levels throughout the public service. Equally important in terms of public acceptance are changes to the conventional wisdom regarding the concept of second language learning. Maori parents are gradually less concerned about the long term effects of early Maori immersion upon English language acquisition. English is now perceived as so pervasive that children seem to absorb the language regardless of its role within the primary school curriculum (see also Burnaby, 1982; Hall, 1986). In its place has emerged a view of children who, with firm roots in their ancestral tongue and in possession of a strong sense of identity and belonging, are capable of acquiring English as a fluent second language (see Report, He Huarahi, 1980; also for comparative results, Lambert and Tucker, 1977; Nedler and Lindfors, 1977). These issues over aboriginal language promotion are hardly unique to New Zealand. Such a focus is typical of social movements elsewhere to redefine power relations, and to entrench the rights of those whose traditional language skills may limit their opportunities for socioeconomic advancement (Smitherman, 1984).

Public endorsement is not to suggest an absence of criticism (see Douglas and Douglas, 1983). Diverse accusations revolve about various facets of the scheme, many of which are attributable to competing models of the Kohanga either as a form of compensatory education ("preparation for school") or as a vanguard in spearheading a Maori cultural resurgence ("preparation for life") (Fleras, 1983). Criticism is also motivated by perceived shortcomings in philosophy, structure, and legitimacy (Tainui Report, 1983; Douglas and Douglas, 1983). Critiques range from accusations over Maori Affairs mismanagement of the Kohanga to doubts over the feasibility of salvaging Maori language for posterity. Some attack the Kohanga as a social policy aimed at reforming the Maori rather than attacking the institutionalized racism endemic to New Zealand society. Others criticize Maori parents for their lack of wholehearted involvement while still others argue that Pakeha power structures hold the fate of Maori in their collective hands. One of the country's most respected scholars, Dr. Richard Benton, has commented frequently on this topic:

But the Maori people alone cannot be expected to struggle successfully against all the institutions of the dominant society. These institutions themselves - particularly the schools, the courts, the broadcasting media, and Government offices - have to cooperate in making it possible to use Maori freely outside the home...The Maori community still has at its command the resources to revitalize the language - if the rest of New Zealand society is willing to cooperate in this effort (1981).

Without a corresponding transformation in mainstream attitudes and institutional arrangements, the potential of Kohanga is minimized. Related to this is the unwillingness of local school authorities to extend the Kohanga philosophy into the primary school system (Personal Communication, Director of Maori and Island Education, 9 February 1984). This position is in sharp conflict with those Maori parents who are adamant over maintaining the momentum of Kohanga beyond the nursery stage, and who have threatened to withhold their children from school until such demands are met (Smith, 1983). That several primary schools have capitulated to these threats, and are currently in the process of formulating a bicultural curriculum is indicative of Kohanga's potential at affecting social change within urban contexts (Wellington Evening Post, 14 February 1984).

Government Endorsement: The Politics of Language

Support for the Kohanga is voiced at the political and administrative level, reflecting a gradual shift in national attitudes regarding the future of Maoridom in society. Government departments such as Social Welfare, Education, and Labour, have endorsed the scheme as an important first step toward attainment of Maori equality through cultural enhancement. The Department of Education, for example, portrayed the language nests as having unlimited potential in reducing the social and economic costs of educational failures. Towards that end, the Department recommended the inclusion of Maori as a compulsory subject in the core curriculum (Dominion, 30 March 1984), although to date only an elementary form of Maori speech has been slated for use (Wellington Evening Post, 29 May 1986). Other related organizations such as the New Zealand Committee for Children (IYC) too have endorsed the use of Maori in preschools as a means for enhancing self-esteem and improving levels of achievement among Maori children (Annual Meeting, 29 October 1983). So has the Maori Affairs Department waxed eloquently over the potential of the Kohanga Reo to eliminate the Maori "problem":

Yet the programme which promises the most to the Maori and to many other New Zealanders is that at present referred to as the "Te Kohanga Reo" - a whanau method of raising new born babies in such a way that by the age of 5 they will be bilingual and certainly bi-cultural young New Zealanders... It is a programme that must be seen to have the potential to secure whanau control, discipline, and proper caring of the future young generations of Maori New Zealanders. As this programme secures itself within Maori communities we can predict the end of such things as Maori gangs, street kids, increasing crime, and educational levels disproportionately lower in the Maori case to the rest of the New Zealand population. Instead we can anticipate with confidence a younger generation, intellectually stimulated, more highly motivated, and technically qualified in the basics of 2 world cultures - Maori and Pakeha. The promise of such an end result must be pursued vigorously using the combined resources of the department and the Maori people (Appendices to Journals of the House of Representatives 1983: E-13).

Also prominent in offerings support was the government in power at that time. The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Muldoon, stated in an opening address to a Tu Tangata Wananga Whakatauirā (Maori Leaders Conference) in August of 1983:

To my Government this is a high investment priority. We intend to continue to support Te Kohanga Reo as it is a key to the future health and development of the Maori people. And I venture to say that it could well become the model for child-care rearing for many thousands of other young New Zealanders... With this type of approach it is not hard to visualize young New Zealanders being bi-cultural and bilingual at the age of five years. That is certainly something I would want for any country.

This endorsement was understandable, politically speaking. For, if nothing else, the system of Maori language preschools coincided with the government's attempt to parlay the philosophy of multiculturalism with its focus on cultural preservation and attainment of socioeconomic equality, into a viable Maori policy.⁶ In attempting to stave off the crisis in Maori-government relations, the National Party hoped (a) to ameliorate the worst abuses of Maori impoverishment, both social and cultural, (b) to break the

vicious circle of poverty-crime-defeatism, no prevalent among Maori youth, (c) to concede Maori control over the future of their language without invoking costly expenditures and, (d) to defuse mounting Maori discontent at a time of expanding cultural nationalism. The current Labour government is likewise supportive of the Kohanga Reo, given its oft-repeated commitment to renegotiate a working relationship with the Maori. Support has been expressed at the level of funding (for example, \$1.7 million from the June 1985 budget), and by way of public endorsement for the principle of te reo Maori as a component of New Zealand's multi-culturalism (Wellington Evening Post, 26 May 1986).

Equally pertinent were economic factors, not the least of which was the decision to reduce Maori dependency on the welfare state. Even allowing for the disproportionate sums expended by the welfare sector on confronting the Maori "problem", the high cost of government intervention had failed to accelerate Maori performance in schools or in the workplace. (Report, Economic Monitoring Group, 1978; Report, New Zealand Planning Council, 1979; Martin, 1982). To reduce this dependency on social benefits and to trim state spending over the delivery of services to the Maori, the recession-frayed National party endorsed a policy grounded in the reality of local development and self-sufficiency as complementary to Maori advancement. Other economic reasons included the need to improve the country's trading position and tourist industry (Report, National Growth Strategy, 1983) through promotion of an enlightened race relations attitude. Nor can the growth of a distinctive New Zealand identity as a Polynesian-based South Pacific nation be discounted as a factor in enhancing government recognition of Kohanga Reo (Adams, 1985). It would appear, consequently, that endorsement of Kohanga represented a multicultural concession by the National Party and the currently reigning Labour government for assisting the Maori in sociocultural terms, albeit on grounds both politically justifiable and electorally acceptable.

The Implications of Kohanga Reo: Toward Redefining Maori-Government Relations.

Entrenchment of Tu Tangata in general and Kohanga Reo in particular constitutes a significant departure in government assessment and treatment of the Maori. Evidence of this reassessment is apparent at the political level where varying concessions have now been put into place in an effort to cope with the priority of aboriginal rights and Maori rights to self-determination. Included are: (a) Maori staff placements within bureaucracies, (b) incorporation of te taha Maori ("Maori perspectives") within diverse government and municipal agencies, (c) tentative acceptance of Maori rights inherent within

the Treaty of Waitangi, (d) formal acknowledgement of te reo Maori as one of the official languages of New Zealand, and (e) an increased reliance on a process of bilateral negotiations as consistent with Labour promises of government by consensus and consultation. Government moves in September of 1980 to allow the Maori Council to redraft a new Maori Affairs Act to replace the archaic provisions of the 1953 Act and its amendment in 1967 serves as additional evidence of this political shift to concede once again the unique cultural basis of Maori as tangata whenua with the right to take limited charge of their social destiny (Fleras, 1986). Finally, of purely symbolic value but still of considerable importance is the Governor-General's recent portrayal of New Zealand as two nations within one state, in contrast to Captain Hobson who also at Waitangi but 145 years earlier proclaimed this country to be comprised of one people.

Alongside this shift in the political domain are changes within the content of Maori activism which can be attributed at least in part to the influence of the Kohanga. Maori national consciousness and appeals for self-determination (*mana Maori motuhake*) have emerged recently as potent political forces in challenging the Tu Tangata agenda (Awatere, 1984). The protest activism of the late 1970's has now transformed into political action, directed at decolonizing the monocultural bias of Maori policy into one which is increasingly cognizant of that country's bicultural imperatives (Greenland, 1984; Levine and Vasil, 1985). Included under this nationalist fervor are appeals for recognition of aboriginal rights (*tangata whenua of aotearoa*), Maori sovereignty (*rangatiratanga*) and the inclusion of Maori perspectives within the institutional framework of society. Of particular relevance for advancing the cause of Maori aboriginality is the emergence of the Treaty of Waitangi as a potent symbol of Maori self-determination (*mana Maori motuhake*) over their land and resources (Tu Tangata News Magazine, August/September, 1985). This assertiveness is not restricted entirely to activist elements. Even moderate Maori sectors now appear concerned over issues related to self-determination such as the conferral of aboriginal rights and the equitable allocation of resources flowing from a *tangata whenua* status, if the recent publication by the Waitangi Tribunal with respect to the Manuka claims in the Auckland area is anything to go by.

In light of this escalating pressure for redefining the agenda underlying Maori-government relations, political perception of the Maori "problem" has undergone a noticeable transformation at the policy level. Previous assessments of the Maori problem concentrated on issues related to socioeconomic deprivation, poverty or class. Such an analysis restricted solutions to economic terms, amenable only to anti-poverty programs focused around improvements to housing, education and employment op-

portunities. However well intentioned this perspective, it by-passed Maori demands for protection of their bicultural rights as tangata whenua o aotearoa, in addition to precluding conferral of resources emanating from this recognition. But Maori assertiveness as exemplified by the proliferation of the Kohanga Reo concept is transforming government perception of the Maori population from that of a "deprived minority" (Kelsey, 1986), to one revolving about the principle of tangata whenua and mana Maori motuhake. The role of the Kohanga Reo in sharpening the transformation is critical here. After all, it is one thing to place demands upon the government for recognition of Maori sovereignty and self-determination. It is quite another to translate these vague assertions into a tangible and legitimate expression of social reform whose viability is not perceived as threatening to the social fabric. That the Kohanga Reo has been able to encapsulate Maori aspirations into a politically acceptable movement, and to promote these without the threat of backlash or cooptation, is nothing short of remarkable.

It is obvious the implications of the Kohanga Reo as an instrument of social change cannot be taken lightly. Through promotion of te reo Maori, the Kohanga Reo has evolved as a source of power in expressing, manipulating, and transforming the contractual basis of Maori-government relations (see O'Barr, 1984). Just as the Maori "problem" has undergone a significant shift in terms of government policy and administration, so too has the relationship between the Maori and government - as reflected and reinforced by developments within Kohanga Reo - evolved from one based on dependency and control to one grounded on the principles of development and self-determination. By encapsulating the totality of Maori experiences and struggles into a popular social movement, the Kohanga Reo exemplifies the "sharp end" of Maori aspirations to reclaim their rightful status as tangata whenua, and thereby reconstruct an appropriate social reality consistent with their aboriginal rights. Not only does the Kohanga Reo represent a politically acceptable channel for rerouting Maori ambitions but, as a powerful political symbol of Maori self-determination over language and destiny, it also consolidates New Zealand's ongoing transition from monoculturalism to biculturalism. This is not to suggest that the political implications of the Kohanga Reo are limitless. For however much the government may be inclined in principle to renegotiate the contractual grounds of its relationship with the Maori sector, the full implications of the Kohanga at a political or ideological level have yet to be worked out.⁷ Indeed consecutive governments have displayed a willingness to implement only what is necessary to deflect Maori aspirations and avert a pending crisis of legitimacy. Nor can substantial concessions to the government's language policy agenda be guaranteed in light of those ideological, structural, attitudinal, and historical

forces inimical to fundamental reform. One only has to examine the difficulty of ensuring a minimal Maori-English bilingualism at the primary school level to recognize that political goodwill and tolerance are insufficient without active state support for language retention policies (see Edwards, 1985; Hall, 1986). To what extent the Kohanga Reo can respond quickly enough to activist ambitions for transforming a society based on a system of internal colonialism into one which now acknowledges the biculturalism of New Zealand's heritage, and whose first principles embrace a thoroughgoing Maori sovereignty (Awatere, 1984), is likewise difficult to predict. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the politics over Maori language preschools are increasingly symbolic of a resurgence in Maori nationalism. There also is good reason to believe in the continued support by moderate and activist elements of the Kohanga Reo as "spearheading" a redefinition in Maori-government relations.

Part 4 - Canadian Native People And The Principle Of Aboriginal Language Reclamation

The Maori of New Zealand and Canadian Native people share a number of similarities with each other in terms of their relationship to the dominant sector. Both occupy a subordinate status in society, modified to some extent by recent acceptance of multicultural principles and minority rights as components of government policy. Maoris as a group are more likely to work at blue collar occupations, to drop out of school before graduation, and to be arrested or incarcerated for crimes often related to drunkenness or based on visibility. So too are Canadian Native people apt to experience higher rates of unemployment, undereducation, death by violence, and imprisonment (see Report, Indian Self-Government, 1983). They also have been excluded until recently from taking an active role in influencing those policies of relevance to their lives and life-chances. But following rejection of the government's White Paper in 1969 (Weaver, 1981), and amid a growing federal recognition of aboriginal and treaty rights, Indian groups have lobbied strenuously to achieve self-determination at the various political, economic and social levels of Canada. Consequent upon this activism are aboriginal moves to do away with the Indian "problem" through promotion of the principle of aboriginal self-government. It is against this backdrop of sovereignty and self-determination that interest in the notion of aboriginal language retention has escalated. Not only are aboriginal languages perceived now as the embodiment of Native distinctiveness and identity, but their preservation has also emerged as a rallying point around which to mobilize aboriginal activism. Of equal importance for aboriginal children is the role of a Native language toward achieving a positive self-

identity, as well as in contributing to their effective performance at schools or in the workplace. In view of these widely documented relationships among language, personal identity, and socioeconomic achievement (Edwards, 1985), aboriginal spokespersons have endorsed the preservation of Native languages not simply as an option or privilege, but rather as a fundamental aboriginal right to be protected, if necessary by constitutional law (Shkilnyk, 1986).

Evaluating the Native Language "Problem"

Canadian Indians, like their counterparts in New Zealand, have displayed a growing concern over the status of indigenous languages, especially among children and young adults (Shkilnyk, 1985). Statistics appear to give credence to this apprehension. There exist at present 53 aboriginal languages in Canada, all but three of which are in varying stages of deterioration. According to Shkilnyk (1986), 8 languages with fewer than 10 Native speakers are facing extinction. Another 29 are rapidly undergoing decline in terms of the number of youthful speakers, whereas the remaining 13 are moderately endangered. These numbers are consistent with a federal report referred to by the *Toronto Globe and Mail* (26 June 1986) which warned of the possible disappearance of as many as 50 Indian dialects. Earlier studies such as that by Price (1981), pointed to similar trends. According to a 1982 study, of the 7,500 residents of the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, only 200 were fluent Native speakers - a drop of nearly 50% since 1970 (*Toronto Star*, 19 August 1986). Even more compelling than statistical data is the eloquent testimony of Native spokespersons. This passage taken from Shkilnyk (1986) demonstrates all too clearly that language loss is experienced by some Native speakers as a threat to their personal identity and collective survival as a distinct aboriginal nation:

Our Native language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other...it gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, to ties with the broader clan group... There are no English words for these relationships because your social and family life is different from ours. Now if you destroy our language, you not only break down these relationships, but you also destroy other aspects of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describe man's connection with nature, the Great Spirit, the order of things. Without our language, we will cease to exist as a separate people (Eli Taylor, Dakota Sioux from Manitoba, quoted from Shkilnyk, 1985).

Presentday trends with respect to first language exposure are similarly grim. In 1941, fewer than 10% of the Native population referred to English as their first language (Frideres 1983). By 1981, 46.4% of status Indians on reserves reported English to be the first language they learned as children, in contrast to the 46.6% who acknowledged an aboriginal language in this way (Background Notes, Report of the First Ministers Conference, 1985; see also Report, Canadian Native Indians, 1984; Report, Census Highlights, 1985). Non-status Indians have fared even worse. Only 9.5% can claim a Native language as the mother tongue, as opposed to the 79.5% who regard English as such. Even the Inuit are not exempt from this disturbing trend as already 24.2% of the population no longer speaks Inuktitut as a first language. Not only is the decline in relative numbers of concern. Equally disturbing are the gaps between generations: while 40% of Native speakers over 65 identified a Native language as their parental tongue, only 24% of Native children under 14 did so. Also worrisome is the prospect that even among competent first language speakers, 1 youth in 6 will cease to converse primarily in their Native language at home (Report, Census Highlights, 1985).

In the face of these assimilationist pressures by a colonizing language, Native leaders and spokespersons have taken steps to diminish the impact of aboriginal language loss. They have initiated curriculum changes and instructional strategies to incorporate aboriginal verbal skills within the school agenda. Particularly noticeable are Native language courses under the auspices of Native Studies departments or Native-controlled establishments (Sawchuk, 1981). Native languages as subjects of instruction are offered in numerous federal and provincial schools with a high percentage of aboriginal students (Burnaby, 1982). Yet not everyone is pleased by the progress. In-school language programs or traditional solutions based on curriculum adjustments are often regarded as ineffective in promoting the idea of Native language fluency (Shkilnyk, 1985). By way of reactions some have argued that nothing short of total immersion at both the preschool and primary level can reverse the trend. Several experiments in preschool (or kindergarten) immersion have been proposed, most notably among the Six Nation Cayuga (Toronto Star, 19 August 1986), and also by the West Bay Ojibway of Manitoulin Island (Burnaby, 1984; Hall, 1986). In the latter case, however, involving a pilot project of some promise, the Department of Indian Affairs has withdrawn financial support as the program, N'ungosuk does not fit within any set of funding guidelines (Toronto Globe and Mail, 26 June 1986).

Toward Native Language Preschools in Canada?

There is considerable interest elsewhere in the potency of Maori language preschools as language renewal. A number of overseas delegations have contacted Kohanga Reo officials in hopes of replicating this notion of immersion preschools at the domestic level. Such might also be the case in Canada were more aboriginal leaders aware of this experiment in language retention. It has been one of the objectives of this paper to provide some insight into the style and content of the Kohanga Reo, and to emphasize its potency in effecting widespread social changes. What still needs to be discussed is the feasibility of incorporating the Kohanga philosophy and structure within a Canadian context. Potential problems in making this transition should not be minimized. New Zealand constitutes a geographically compact democracy in which the aboriginal population represents nearly 12% of the total population. The Head Office of the Maori Affairs Department is no further than 600 kilometers from the remotest Maori community, thereby allowing close supervision of and ongoing support for departmental programs. Maori-government relations, unlike Indian-Government relations in Canada, are not covered by any legal document; nor do Maoris possess a formal status by virtue of their aboriginality, save for the protective clauses of the Treaty of Waitangi. In light of these and other variables, what is applicable to New Zealand may prove to be inadmissible, irrelevant, or even counterproductive elsewhere (Fleras, 1985b). Or as Sally Weaver has pointed out in a different context:

...the international context of indigenous minorities' affairs there is a tendency to believe "the grass is greener on the other side of the fence" in regard to national political organizations, and to the relationship between indigenous minorities and the nation-state, and this uncritical emulation of models and practices in other countries should be tempered by a careful examination of these models to ensure that inappropriate or ineffectual ones are not advocated or adopted (Weaver, 1983b: 109).

But notwithstanding these cautionary remarks, the applicability of the Kohanga Reo principle in furthering Canadian Indian language aspirations seems plausible. On the surface the establishment of an extensive network of community-based language preschools shows promise of arresting the decline of aboriginal languages. Its worth as a powerful instrument of social change in redefining aboriginality along all points of the sociocultural con-

tinuum cannot be underestimated. Yet certain preconditions need to be addressed if only to improve the chances of consolidating a Native language immersion program at the community level. These are listed below in four groupings:

1) Both aboriginal and political/bureaucratic sectors must recognize the existence of a problem and take a firm position to solve it. There is little doubt the Native sector is aware of the language predicament, although not all agree with the prevailing assessment. Not everyone of course is perturbed by the loss of Native tongues. Others prefer to opt out of any program designed to retain aboriginal languages on the assumption that such a focus may preclude the attainment of success in mainstream society. They recognize in a roundabout way what many aboriginal spokespersons have known all along - that Canadian society as a whole is not yet ready to legitimate the value of English-Native bilingualism (Shkilnyk, 1986). But increasingly there is growing consensus among Native people regarding the status and importance of indigenous languages as the cornerstone of aboriginality and self-determination.

By way of contrast to Native sectors is the federal government which to date has not displayed any sustained policy commitment if budgetary expenditures are any criterion. Funding for retention of aboriginal languages did not materialize until the 1983/84 budget year when \$1 million was added on to Indian social and cultural development programs. This neglect is in sharp contrast to federal financing of French as one of the official languages (currently at approximately \$500 million per annum), and the nearly \$4 million allocated to ethnic groups as part of the government's heritage language program (Shkilnyk, 1986). Such a position is especially annoying to certain aboriginal spokespersons who have criticized the federal government's reluctance to financially support an Ojibwa language immersion preschool (N'ungosuk) at West Bay despite making \$1.8 million available for a Native trade and business show at the Convention Centre in Toronto (Toronto Globe and Mail, 26 June 1986).

The lack of adequate funding is problematic enough. What is even more distressing is the absence of any comprehensive policy statement. To be sure, the Department of Indian Affairs has not abdicated all responsibility for Native language instruction (Annual Report, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1984/85). According to an Indian Education paper circulated in 1982 by the Indian Affairs Department, nearly 32,000 of 73,280 Native children were exposed to some form of Native language instruction. In addition, apparent support for Native language courses exists in parts of

Quebec, as well as in Ontario where the Departments of Indian Affairs and Education have established a series of curriculum guidelines from kindergarten to secondary school. But modifications to the curriculum as part of the regular school program are one thing; fundamental change to the agenda of Indian education and language retention is another. Whereas the Department of Indian Affairs is prepared to support the inclusion of Native languages courses as a subject of instruction in their own right (Shkilynk, 1985), it repudiates funding for any proposal based on Native language as the medium of instruction. Others find federal concessions to be both inadequate and inconsistent with contemporary aboriginal aspirations. No longer are aboriginal educationists interested in tinkering with adjustments to the curriculum. Rather what is at issue now are fundamental changes to the agenda over the content, style, and funding of Indian education. In short, the challenge is obvious enough: political tolerance and local rhetoric are insufficient without direct action. Federal bureaucrats and politicians must exhibit the will to create a comprehensive yet equitable program of language retention that respects local diversity and community involvement. Nothing less than a total government commitment to renewal and enrichment as a national priority can be tolerated given the deterioration of aboriginal language resources (Hall, 1986). Native leaders too have to exert additional pressure on central policy structures by politicizing the issue of aboriginal language survival to the point of concerted response. Only when various publics are sensitized to the waste of those linguistic resources that are unique to Canada alone and whose destinies depend solely on conditions within this country, will appropriate policy concessions be implemented (Hall, 1986).

2. Attainment of a viable aboriginal language preschool system seems to be dependent upon mobilizing both the community and political sectors into action. That the success of any program is dependent upon the participation of a cross-section of the community would appear to be self-evident, and is consistent with long-standing aboriginal initiatives to maintain the principle of local control throughout all facets of the Indian education process (Report, Indian Control of Indian Education, 1972; also Report, Comprehensive Implementation, 1981). But attainment of collective involvement may be problematic. As Edwards (1985) has noted elsewhere, efforts to promote nationalist languages are often restricted to a minority of the minority, most frequently to those who are strongly positioned within the community. This gap between leaders and constituents needs to be reduced if success, as measured by local participation and community enthusiasm, is to be achieved. Once assured of meaningful involvement during the plan-

ning and implementation phases, members of the community must realize that their collective voluntary effort will have some kind of payoff, and that they are capable of taking control of a situation for the promotion of tangible social benefits. The recruitment of community elders appears to be especially important as they constitute a repository of much that is authentic about the past. Parents too must be encouraged to attend and become involved if only to ensure some degree of continuity between the preschool and the domestic context. Without parental input and control, a Native language preschool movement could well lose its forcefulness as an instrument of social change whether in terms of cultural nationalism or compensatory education.

Just as the family/community support is indispensable to this type of endeavour, so too is the backing of the political/bureaucratic sector. Linguistic pressures outside the aboriginal context are of sufficient intensity that by imposing the burden of language renewal on community shoulders without adequate government support is to accept the demise of indigenous tongues (Hall, 1986). The central policy sector must be willing to confer legitimacy upon aboriginal languages not simply in terms of funding or resources, but more importantly by way of incorporating the concept of indigenous language retention as a policy priority. Following upon attainment of federal support in improving arrangements at the local level, a fairly strict division of labour must be reinstated. Control over the preschool should exist in the hands of the local community, not in the clutches of a remote bureaucracy, be it Ottawa, or a provincial capital. Funding and coordinating activities must respond first and foremost to local initiatives and community-based solutions without, however, negating the reality of aboriginal language renewal as an issue of national concern. But whether the Department of Indian Affairs is willing to devolve power and responsibility over local programs of language retention in the face of increased technocratization within the bureaucracy (Ponting 1986), is suspect at the moment.

3. The chances of success appear to be greater if the proposed preschool system is capable of incorporating aboriginal values and traditional pedagogical styles into the ongoing operation. As already pointed out, the Kohanga Reo enlisted select Maori values such as the whanau as part of the organizational framework and operating technique. This concession to Maoritanga has proven to be a shrewd one: national spokespersons have been able to capitalize on the Kohanga's cultural distinctiveness in negotiating for support among central policy makers. A commitment to preschooling with a cultural difference also has assured the Kohanga Reo of legitimacy

within Maori circles, a legitimacy the public had withheld to some degree from conventional preschool systems. Success appears to be further enhanced if the focus of the preschool is immersive in content and direction, thereby replicating a natural learning environment. There is simply too much evidence of failure when second language teaching is conducted with the same self-conscious attention which is directed toward other subjects of the school curriculum (Edwards, 1985). The immersion orientation seems to avoid the fragmentation and artificiality of conventional language programs since children are inclined to employ their speech habits across varying domains and interactive networks. The apparent success of French language immersion at primary levels of schooling represents a useful model for replicating a natural learning environment as part of the teaching experience.

4. The notion that language maintenance programs cannot be considered in isolation from related government policies seems obvious enough (see Edwards, 1985). Such programs need to be integrated within an overall policy framework to extract maximum impact. In New Zealand, the entrenchment of Tu Tangata as government policy paved the way for bilateral support of a language retention program. Only upon rephrasing the Kohanga Reo as a possible solution to the Maori "problem" were central policy authorities willing to make the necessary concessions. Similarly, in Canada the enshrinement of "existing aboriginal and treaty rights", in addition to a federal commitment to recognize the right of aboriginal sectors to self-government, provides a solid basis for entrenching aboriginal language rights. Consistent with the special rights inherent within the aboriginality provisions of the Constitution, steps need to be taken to confer special status on aboriginal languages - comparable in part to the recognition accorded to English or French. Finally, a degree of comprehensive planning should be instituted as part of the overall national priority strategy. Without a long-term program in respect of objectives and goals, questions are left in the balance regarding: (a) how to accommodate within the education system the passage of Native children who are fluent in an aboriginal language? (b) how to incorporate into the workplace those linguistically competent speakers who are conversant in an indigenous language? (c) how to motivate the non-Native sector such as the mass media in promoting the acceptability of aboriginal languages as a legitimate expression of communication? Until answers are forthcoming, there is a danger of raising expectations which may well be unattainable in the realm of language and

society.

Conclusion And Summary

The significance of language in furthering the ambitions of nationalistic movements such as those of the aboriginal populations in Canada and New Zealand is widely acknowledged (see Edwards, 1985; Sutcliffe and Wong, 1986). Not only does a viable Native language provide a tool for communication across meaningful domains, but it also serves as a symbol of group solidarity and cultural distinctiveness, thereby acting as a catalyst for mobilizing aboriginal sentiments into political action (see Bourhis et al, 1979; Ross, 1979). Even in situations where active verbal skills are not in evidence, the vitality of language exudes an emotive force which is integral to collective identity and pride. Equally important is the role of language in accentuating changes at the societal level by restructuring those aspects pertaining to the ideology and organization of majority-minority relations (Taylor and Giles, 1979). This is not to suggest that widespread fluency is absolutely necessary for nationalist movements to evolve. Various other group or personal markers do exist, including homeland, religion, or simply opposition to the majority sector. But the link between language and aboriginality is a powerful one in sharpening boundaries and a sense of groupness quite apart from that of the dominant population (Edwards, 1985). Nor can its potential in realigning minority-majority relations be underestimated, given the significant correlation between language and power (see Kramarae, 1984). Not surprisingly in light of its threatened decline as a vehicle of power and identity, aboriginal spokespersons have taken steps to ensure the retention of Native languages among children and young adults.

This paper has described one such strategy of aboriginal language preservation employed by the Maori of New Zealand. The objectives, content, and organizational structure of these Maori language preschools were discussed, preceded by a review of the historical forces leading up to the establishment of Kohanga Reo. Also examined was the impact and implication of the Kohanga Reo as an agent of social change in redefining Maori-government relations. Evidence suggests that the Kohanga is positioned now at the vanguard of both moderate (*tu tangata*) and activist (*tangata whenua*) movements for social reform. Lastly discussed were its implications: whether or not the principle of Kohanga Reo can be applied to Canadian Indian context should be an interesting proposition, one that is sure to provoke further debate over the politics of language, aboriginality, and power.

NOTES

1. Research for this paper, in addition to related topics on Maori policy and administration, has been generously funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
2. Two types of preschool traditions predominate in New Zealand (Ritchie, 1978; Meade, 1977; McDonald, 1973). The first of these, the free kindergarten, operates under the auspices of trained supervisors from the Department of Education. Kindergartens are normally regarded as more "disciplined" and "structured" than alternate forms of preschools. The second type, play centres, are likewise under the authority of the Education Department although structurally they are organized as a collectivity of parents who assume ultimate responsibility for the children. Both kindergartens and play centres, despite differences in approach - differences more apparent than real in many cases - agree on the principle of holistic child development through free choice and play. Child or day care centres, on the other hand, do not conform to the criteria established for preschools. They are under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare and are perhaps best regarded as a parental substitute service which operates for all or part of the day with varying amounts of custodial care ("babysitting") or socialization (Hall, 1977; Smith and Bain, 1977).
3. The Kohanga Reo is best analyzed at one level by way of its similarities and contrasts with orthodox preschools. At another level, the Kohanga Reo would appear to exemplify a natural progression of community-based preschooling initiated by the Maori Affairs Department following publication of the Hunn Report in 1961. Under the guidance of the Department's welfare officers, Maori mothers began to take advantage of kindergarten or playcentre traditions in order to improve their children's prospects (see McDonald, 1973; Barney, 1975). But, apart from a few Maori owned and controlled establishments, existing forms of preschool were envisaged as inappropriate for Maori needs. Many regarded their middle-class frame of reference as indifferent to, or ignorant of, Maori aspirations; others were dismissed as openly disdainful of Maori children and their cultural heritage. (Watson, 1965; Report, Maori Education, 1970; Brown, 1979; Report on Preschool Education, 1971). Alternate forms were proposed as a result to ensure Maori control over early childhood training (Report, Preschool Education, 1971; McDonald, 1974). Along the East Coast, for instance, groups of mothers instigated a *whanau* type of play centre with all members of

the community contributing to the operation. In the Waikato-Maniapoto region, the Maori Family Education Association established in 1968 a series of Maori operated preschools consistent with the format of conventional playcentres (McDonald 1976). By 1970, nearly 80 family preschool centres had been established with a total enrollment of about 500 children (Report, Preschool Education, 197t). Though unmistakably Maori in style and organization, these informal whanau centres were conducted almost entirely in English, mainly to compensate Maori children for alleged deficiencies. In effect, then, this and other local Maori-run preschools - including the Te Kohanga project initiated by Dr. Jane Ritchie of Waikato University and based on the compensatory education model proposed by Bereiter and Englemann (1966) - were envisioned as strategies for accelerated learning in English verbal skills and Western intellectual aptitudes (Ritchie, 1978). Only with the establishment of the Kohanga Reo has there appeared an alternative system of preschooling catering to Maori children (Tu Tangata News Magazine, April/May 1986).

4. It is not my intent to evaluate the effectiveness of the Kohanga scheme, particularly since many of its most important aspects revolve about immeasurable, intangible qualities such as identity and self-confidence. Even in the areas of health, education, or crime, the Kohanga does not promise immediate payoffs but rather long-term prospects (see also, Memo to the Cabinet Committee on Expenditure, 12 April 1983). Measurements for the degree of language development of each child are equally difficult to gauge. Thus, statements to the effect that Maori language was used consistently and naturally by children in four of five centres visited by the officials from the Education Department during a fact-finding mission (Cabinet Committee on Expenditure, 25 January 1984) are open to considerable interpretation.
5. References to the Maori population are not intended to suggest any uniformity of attitude or belief over their future status in society. There are numerous shades of opinion, varying from indifference or total commitment (*tangata whenua o aotearoa*) on the one hand, to moderate accommodation (Tu Tangata) on the other. Maori respondents from Auckland may differ from those in Wellington, in the same way differences exist between rural and urban regions, men and women, and young and old. Yet, however divided they may be in general, one can discern a growing willingness among the Maori to question the acceptance of their subordinate status in society as natural, inevitable or necessary. Similarly government responses to

Maori assertions are highly variable. Even now, although a commitment to protect Maori interests and to acknowledge their aspirations as *tangata whenua* has gathered momentum in recent years, various sectors continue to define Maoris as a social "problem" whose unwarranted demands for language promotion detract from the attainment of national goals. That government officials have become aware of Maori demands, and considerable goodwill has been expended in articulating the goals of equality and multiculturalism is evident enough. But conversion of rhetoric into action has been a slow and difficult process, attributable not only to negative attitudes but more importantly to firmly entrenched historical, structural, and ideological factors. Finally, to anticipate later discussion, Canadian Native people do not constitute a homogenous constituency, divided as they are into various linguistic and cultural groupings. Programs and projects that meet the needs of one group could well be inappropriate to the social requirements of another community. To suggest otherwise represents a serious distortion of Native needs and ambitions, although broad patterns may be discernible at the level of objectives and strategy.

6. Acceptance of multiculturalism as government policy is not without its problems or criticism (Fleras, 1984b). Difficulties arise from a lack of consensus over the meaning or implications of the term (Merge, 1979), to accusations of government complicity in manipulating the concept for political ends (O'Regan, 1982). In an attempt to circumvent some of the limitations within multiculturalism, Maori leaders have begun to shift toward a bicultural perspective, a perspective which they feel acknowledges their special status as the indigenous inhabitants of the country and recognizes the bicultural reality - Maori and Pakeha - upon which New Zealand society is founded (Report, *Race Against Time*, 1982).
7. Not that government support is wholehearted or without political motivation. Mixed reactions within the political sector have raised certain questions about its relationship to the Kohanga. How, for example, can political officials and state authorities offer support without appearing patronizing or anxious to coopt the system? To what extent should public funds be employed to establish a separate system of Maori pre-schools? Does the existence of special privileges pose a threat to national unity, or are they simply an anomaly in a reputedly egalitarian society? Why should assistance be provided in regenerating a dying and/or irrelevant language, particularly in the face of the undisputed dominance of English (see Christchurch Press, 15 April 1986)? Will

knowledge of Maori as a second language detract from *children's* ability to acquire English as a tool for material improvement? How will the electorate react to Government initiatives in perpetuating the status of Maori language? What are the long term implications of the Kohanga on the primary school system, or of enrolment numbers in conventional preschools (Douglas and Douglas, 1983)? These and other questions have not been answered to the satisfaction of those in central policy-making structures, ensuring in the process a lively atmosphere of debate over the implications of the Kohanga.

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