



Henrietta Maxwell leads the waiata after John Bennett's speech.



Henrietta Maxwell and Moehau Reedy lead an action song.

Val Burns, Director of Early Childhood Education, doesn't see that happening. "Because of the way pre-school has grown in this country," she said, "each group has been independent of the other and has lobbied only for itself. Some anomalies have developed, and we will inherit the existing situation. But from here on in, we will develop policy and put it up to government for funding. We won't have to stretch our existing resources over everybody."

There are advantages in independence too. Playcentres know that already; they believe that 100% Government funding of anything can kill it. Koro Wetere said the same to the Aotea Regional Kohanga Reo Wananga in mid-January. "If you had waited for official recognition and full official support," he said, "I can assure you that there would be only about 30 or 40 language nests today, instead of our 444." He pointed to the kindergartens, which took a hundred years to have 534 kindergartens, and only five or six new ones a year.

The whole area of language nest training and finance is currently under review. A committee of officials from different Government departments have just finished putting together a paper for Cabinet. It is not available for the public. Mr Wetere says it has been looking at possible changes in Labour Department training and subsidy schemes, the childcare changes, and "possible further developments in early childhood care and education."

The impact of the kohanga reo movement on the pre-school scene has been enormous. It has not necessarily taken children away from other pre-school services: most children at kohanga reo have not been at other pre-schools. To the pre-school movement, it offers a real alternative early childhood experience for children who might otherwise miss out. For parents, it gives another option, a vital and lively one, in the ever-widening range of opportunities for their children. It also encourages Maori parents to be involved in education, an experience that doesn't stop at pre-school level. And to other minority groups, it offers a pattern which has proved successful in society which can be very unsympathetic to cultural differences.

"The kohanga reo movement with its cultural force, size and success," said Helen Cook of the childcare service, at the Early Childhood Forum, "is not so much seeking accommodation. It is challenging the mainstream itself to make a place for it."