

Maori language total immersion course . . . sink or swim

E KORE e ngaro te kakano i ruia mai i Rangiatea.

He whakatauki na te Raukawa Trustees i tuku atu ki nga iwi o te motu i runga i te kaupapa hei whakatupuranga mo te tau rua mano.

Tena koutou, tena koutou, kia ora ano tatou katoa.

THE Raukawa Trustees have set about staging a major revival of the maori language and I believe they are winning.

As a student in te reo, I attended the sixteenth language immersion course run by the trustees at the beginning of this year. My purpose was to evaluate the course curriculum and feed this information back to the trustees.

The language wananga were started by Raukawa in 1979 in response to a major decline in native speakers throughout their rohe. Raukawa joined with Ngati Toarangatira and Te Atiawa to form the trustees in 1936.

Three wananga are held each year catering for differing levels with preference being given first to students of Te Wananga o Raukawa, (the university), then members of the tribal confederation, and other tribal areas and then pakeha.

The main feature of these wananga is the banning of the speaking of english for the whole week of the course. Most of the wananga are held on rural marae because of this. Course director Rangi

Nicholson said it's easier and less distracting to be isolated from the pervading influence of english found in urban areas.

But the sixteenth was held on Raukawa marae, right in the heart of Otaki, and this said Rangi was an experiment also to test the kaupapa. This introduction the twenty or students heard in english on the Sunday beginning of the course. Following on from the powhiri, the kaupapa was laid out before us, in english said Rangi, so that no-one would misunderstand. He suggested that some would be almost meditative for the first couple of days in their new-found language limbo, but that we should all be supportive and patient while sticking to the rule of no english.

Our kaumatua were introduced, nga koroua: Te Koroua Whakamoe and Tukawekai Kereama and nga kuia: Rangiamohia Parata and Rongokino Hekenui. They were to be our main tutors while several of the rangatahi from Te Wananga o Raukawa were to assist. Mere Poipoi, a tutor in maori at Victoria University and

a longtime supporter of the wananga, also tutored.

After such a daunting introduction, our week of te reo maori anake could only make a quiet start.

If you the reader find it strange that I should be telling you about a maori language course in the english language, don't. For one thing I picked up spoken skills that haven't reached down to my typing fingers yet. For another, I found my biggest problem was thinking Maori first and foremost. The temptation for a second language learner like me is to think in your first language and then translate across.

I meditated. And learned many ways of asking questions in maori; hea aha i pera ai, me penei?

The wananga was structured to allow a variety of work ranging from learning waiata tawhito to korero about the paipera. Each wananga was around an hour long with breaks signalled by the tangi of the pere. More about that later.

The sessions with Te Koroua Whakamoe were the most enjoyable to me because it was a pleasure to listen to the music of his reo. Most times I attend hui I am working and it sometimes takes the fun out of it by having to write down what speakers are saying whether or not it makes sense.

