

'Te Kohanga Reo' (The Language Nest)

"whanau/family education programmes should be more bi-cultural with an emphasis on Maoritanga and kinship values particularly in pre-school and elementary education."

(Tu Tangata Wananga Whakataurira 1980)

Today, society has difficulty in solving many of its social problems thrown up by our modern way of life. The traditional Maori value system of whanau can be utilised to manoeuvre communities past many of these difficulties, particularly the constant stress upon young families.

In the case of the Maori, the extended family system or whanau still remains after a battering over the last 30 or 40 years. But now the "working mother" customs needs to be recognised and accommodated. The application of whanau methods is already helping to meet this new habit but it needs to do more.

Another device is bilingual programmes in Maori and English for under five-year-olds. Maori people are striving very hard to revive the spoken Maori language. There are many efforts such as the introduction into the high schools of Maori as an optional study language.

In similar fashion, there are courses at universities and over the last year, community programmes spearheaded in the "rakau" style. Yet none of these can do more than stimulate and encourage individuals to take initiatives themselves.

What is needed is a home environment where Maori language is spoken naturally as one of our two native tongues — the other being English.

The Te Kohanga Reo programme is designed to stimulate growth of Maori whanau centres that offer the best child care in an environment of Maoritanga. Where Maori is the language. Where love and care spring from the whanau. These centres can be in many places. In our homes, on marae, in churches, in factories, offices, kokiri centres — anywhere people decide to use the whanau value system.

This programme will demonstrate how children can become bilingual in Maori and English by the age of five years.

Controlling authority

The organisation responsible for the management of a Te Kohanga Reo programme must be well respected and an effective Maori agency. This agency might well share the responsibility with

the Maori Education Foundation or the Department of Maori Affairs. But in any case management and control must be of the highest order.

It is anticipated that there will be a shared responsibility for setting up of any programme between the Department of Maori Affairs, the Maori Education Foundation and the local community agency. The Maori Education Foundation will in fact provide training and development for project supervisors by appointing one or more national co-ordinators.

General operation

It is envisaged that the Te Kohanga Reo programme will operate using the same basic principles for child care and growth at present adopted by the best pre-school, kindergarten, or play centre organisations.

The difference will be the use of Maori language as the only means of verbal communication in the centre. This will require therefore the development of a Maori atmosphere to meet a child's needs in the areas of love, training and affection.

This brings a demand for exceptional people in the form of supervisors who can meet the rigorous requirements that come from normal child rearing, and in addition provide Maori language and style.

The centres would be open Monday to Friday at times convenient to parents. It



will provide a full day service at reasonable cost to parents. Children will receive the best care — food, play facilities, a nursery, and health protection. In fact, no child will be admitted to the centre without full counselling being undertaken with parents and their total agreement to participating in the programme for at least three years — exceptions can be negotiated.

