



part of the course instruction would be to ignore the more subtle pressures at work on the students. Like the spirited defence of parents who weren't to blame for not passing on the language to their children. And the ones who had only recently discovered their taha Maori. And observing some of this soul-searching and maybe looking at their own roots, the non-Maori students who made up half the course numbers.

From tentative beginnings, the students started to trust one another and share not only stammered phrases but also their food in the communal meals. And when it came time to use the language over the meal table, there were some hungry bellies who just couldn't get the hang of asking for food.

While on the subject of food it's timely to mention one of my fellow students, Dalvanus, who for the duration of the course and in our hearts, took his Maori name Maui. Well-known in Maori circles as an entertainer and just now breaking through to a wider New Zealand audience, he epitomised the position that many young Maori find themselves in. Of trying to 'make it' in the larger world before returning to pick up the riches of the first world.

For Maui the course was particularly important. He wants to use the rich store-house of the Maori language professionally in his songs. His sister Barletta also attended the course and was a mainstay on the numerous singing occasions.

It it sounds as though learning the Maori language requires eating and singing, you're on the right path. To that, add purpose and laughter and you're almost there.

It's hard to say just how we picked up our small beginnings in te reo Maori.

Each became proficient in our own way, and while it still may be a tangled mess of words to some, we understood each other.

Towards the end of the course we spent a weekend at Nga Tokowaru Marae, near Levin where our newly-discovered tongue found a home as well as friends amongst our gathered families. It was obvious that for many

of the course students the marae was a homecoming to themselves.

And now it's over and a new bunch of tongue-tied students has taken our place.

It's up to us to plant the seed now within us and to nurture it to full growth.

Kia kaha ki te tautoko i te reo Maori.

Philip Whanga

An outside view

You would never guess that the pot-holed, cracked and decaying car park was a marae and that the old grey pre-fabs were part of it too.

But this is the marae of the Wellington Polytechnic school of languages.

Here people from all walks of life, all parts of the country and world come to study Maori.

Up to six years ago there was no Maori taught in the school of languages and it was a Polytech staff member Mr Martin Winiata who made the first moves towards introducing a Maori course.

The course was set up in 1977 and has been going strongly ever since.

It has three full-time tutors, Roimata Kirikiri, Huirangi Waikerepuru, and Teariki Mei and offers six week courses six times a year.

The school is designed to take in adults who may or may not have any knowledge in Maori and in six weeks make them orally competent. But in doing that the people also learn a great deal about Maori culture.

Many things set the Maori language classrooms apart from any others in the polytech and one of the most notable is the atmosphere.

There is a true sense of whanau there, where tutors and pupils mix freely together.

Each day tutors and students have a shared lunch using the few cooking facilities.

This type of sharing flows over into the learning, and students help each other as much as they can.

The students come from government departments, church and other groups and alongside housewives and mothers, tackle the language.

The course has even attracted overseas people. One Japanese student came here especially to learn the language after reading Maori literature at university.

By teaching adults Maori, the course is playing a vital role in keeping the language alive and it is also promoting better understanding of Maori culture.

Plans are under way to build a new marae up in the Polytech complex but until then the little pre-fabs and cracked car park will carry on their part in keeping the Maori language very much alive.

Raewyn Rasch