THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

– Report by Stephanie Woerde, 2016 Churchill Fellow –

The Peter Mitchell Fellowship to inspire best practice in the design/implementation of Language Nest-style programs in Australia

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Signed:  S.Woerde  Date: 07/11/2017
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Language; Nest; Revitalisation; Indigenous; Aboriginal; Education; Reconciliation
To the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, thank you for the invaluable opportunity to embark on a truly incredible learning journey. Thank you for believing in the worth of this project; such belief means so much to me, and to First Languages in Australia.

Thank you also to my Fellowship sponsor, Mr Peter Stuckey Mitchell, for leaving such a special legacy in supporting young Australians to actively pursue their learning aspirations through the Churchill Fellowship experience.

I am further grateful to Ms Emma Anderson, Dr Knut Olawsky, Ms Belinda Wong and Professor Ghil’ad Zuckermann for the encouragement that you provided in supporting my application for a Churchill Fellowship in the first place.

To all those I had the pleasure and privilege of connecting with overseas, thank you for your generosity of both time and spirit. It has been such an honour to have had the opportunity to meet and be mentored by those at the coalface of Language Nest initiatives across the globe. I have very much come to learn that it is people that are at the core of Language Nest programs, and I am so grateful to be able to share the energy and encouragement of people like yourselves with people and communities back at home. Heartfelt thanks for warmly welcoming my visits, for exchanging stories of great hope and happiness, and for the endless inspiration. You are true lightworkers.

To Reconciliation Australia and my Narragunnawali teammates, thank you for allowing me to embrace my Churchill Fellowship endeavours and be away from my desk for six weeks, appreciating the important interrelationship between First Languages revitalisation and reconciliation.

Thank you also to Ailsa Purdon, Anna Crane, Jackie van den Bos, Susan Poetsch, Dr Samantha Disbray, Gretel MacDonald and Yamurna Napurrurla Oldfield who, upon my return to Australia, warmly shared their own reflections and recommendations based on their own experiences with First Languages education and revitalisation work in the early years setting. Such input certainly supported me to evaluate and present the Conclusions in this Report with an even stronger and well-considered sense of conviction.

Finally, to the team and ninggoowoong (family) at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring, this journey has never felt like mine alone and I feel as if I was carrying you with me every step of the way. I would like to acknowledge Miriwoong Elders and Traditional Custodians past, present and future alike – those that have walked the lands and spoken the language of Miriwoong Country for tens of thousands of years before me; those who have walked alongside me and entrusted me with such meaningful work as together we established the Miriwoong Language Nest program; and those woothoo-woothoong (children) who represent the strong community leaders and language champions of the future.

I understand that, in sponsoring this Fellowship, Peter Mitchell did so “convinced of the need to do something for the youth of Australia.” I would like to dedicate this Report to the clever young learners involved in the Miriwoong Language Nest program, and to children in communities across Australia – and the world – striving to engage with the significance of First Languages in whichever ways they can. You are shining stars, and the future of Australia and our global community looks bright because of you.

Woothoo-woothoonga gooloo-goolooob berrandawoon woorlab berranben-ning boorriyang woorlanga dawa-geny, ninggoowo-geny, theniyenhanga-geny. Woonjoo-woonjoo yarrenkoo-woori berraying woorlanga bawadang waniwoogeng!
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been estimated that, globally, a language is lost in as little as every two weeks\(^1\) – effectively three languages becoming extinct, or ‘sleeping,’\(^2\) in the six-week period that I carried out my Churchill Fellowship journey. Following language loss can come a corresponding disconnection from culture and identity, which can be particularly damaging for young children who, in their early years, are developing the foundations of their sense of self and self-esteem. This issue may be compounded for those Indigenous children already experiencing a broader degree of disadvantage due to the intergenerational traumas of colonial impact, such as exposure to substance abuse, domestic violence, and culturally inaccessible or insensitive early learning systems.

Around the world, great efforts are being made to maintain, revitalise and revive Indigenous languages, and the Language Nest movement is a powerful example of these efforts. As such, the aim of my Churchill Fellowship is to inspire best practice in the design/implementation of Language Nest-style programs in Australia.

“\textit{What you are doing is invaluable for these children; to teach them Language is to connect them to Country, Spirit and Themselves. I believe this is the way to healing for these little ones, and it brings such pride and strength to the families.}”

“The kids feel so clever and good about themselves. I believe [the program] helps their English and ability to learn in other areas too.”

“[It] helps to build a strong sense of identity” and “increases cultural understanding and respect” among all children involved.

“I never thought I’d say this about a language program, but you and your team save the lives of children because you make them feel proud of who they are and give them plenty of reasons to feel confident in themselves. This provides a protective factor for the children both now and in adulthood. It may make the difference between a positive life or a premature one.”

These opening quotes represent just a small sample of the overwhelmingly positive feedback received about the Miriwoong Language Nest program of Kununurra, Western Australia, which I had the great privilege and joy of supporting the establishment of, together with the team at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring, between 2013-2016. While criteria or conceptualisations around what constitutes a ‘Language Nest’ can vary somewhat between contexts, a Language Nest is, at its core, a culturally responsive Indigenous language education and revitalisation environment focused on full immersion in the early years setting.

Having now entered its fourth formal year of operation, the Miriwoong Language Nest program has seen the linguistic landscape in Kununurra evolve from a context of only a handful of Elders able to fluently speak the local – and critically endangered – Miriwoong language, to now more than three hundred\(^3\) children regularly engaging in Miriwoong language learning each week. Beyond Miriwoong linguistic skill development, the program has also shown very positive indicators in terms of fostering strengthened socio-emotional development and self-esteem; increased intercultural awareness, empathy and respect; and wider educational engagement and achievement potential for all children involved. Nevertheless, the Miriwoong Language Nest is still in its infancy, and is among the first of few Language Nest programs in Australia. As such, there is much to learn from the success and sustainability of Language Nest initiatives in the international context so as to support the early benefits stemming from emerging programs in Australia to be well harnessed into the future.


\(^2\) Inspired by the attitude of Professor Ghil’ad Zuckermann, a wonderful language warrior, I prefer to use the term “sleeping” over terms such as “dead” or “defunct,” believing in the potential for languages to be revived even after they have been formally classified as “extinct.”

\(^3\) (indeed, now often more than four hundred)
My Churchill Fellowship experience gave me the invaluable opportunity to travel to New Zealand, where the *Kōhanga Reo* (Language Nest) model first originated in the 1980s and where, notwithstanding great challenges over time, more than four hundred and sixty *kōhanga reo* continue to be active to this day. It also took me to parts of the USA (Hawai‘i) and Canada (British Columbia), to compare how the model has been effectively adopted or adapted to support other Indigenous languages in other cultural contexts.

This Report represents a summarised culmination of the key conversations and observations I engaged in throughout my Churchill Fellowship journey. Its purpose is less focused on providing a theoretical case for the efficacy of Language Nest-style programs, which is already highlighted in established literature. That is, existing literature strongly suggests that:

- Within supportive learning environments, bi-/multi-lingualism has great capacity to generate a range of cognitive and communicative benefits at the individual and inter-cultural level. Correspondingly, second language literacy has been shown to enhance rather than hinder first language literacy.
- Where one or more languages being learned is an Indigenous language, benefits can extend well beyond the linguistic sphere to include improved wellbeing and socio-economic variables. For example, research emphasises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak Indigenous languages are at once more likely to attend school, gain a post-school qualification and be employed; have markedly better physical and mental health; and are less likely to engage in high risk alcohol consumption/illicit substance use, or to have been a victim of threatened or physical violence.
- Particularly for young/early language learners, immersion-based education is strongly conducive to successful language acquisition and advancement.
- As an immersion-based Indigenous language learning model for the early childhood context, the Language Nest model is an exemplar case. Indeed, it is hailed as having “served as more than a model: it has been an inspiration to a number of different groups” across the globe.

As such, this Report is focused more so on learnings concerning the practicalities of designing/implementing Language Nest initiatives, appreciating how these on-the-ground, operational elements combine to reinforce the kinds of theoretical research results listed above. The Report explores some of the everyday, grassroots action behind Language Nest programs, as well as some of the longer-term and higher-level logistical questions around succession planning and sustainability. Note that I do not consider my authorship of this Report to make me an ‘authority’ on Language Nest matters, nor to represent an entirely adequate or appropriate ‘voice’ for the Language Nest case studies I engaged with overseas – it is merely intended to capture reflections from a learning journey that I am humbled and privileged to have been a part of, and that I see strong value in sharing with those beginning or considering Language Nest-style programs in Australia.

A series of recommendations have been summarised on pages 76-79 of this Report. As an overarching comment, however, my Churchill Fellowship experience – and the opportunity to engage, firsthand, with the incredible people and progress of Language Nest initiatives internationally – has only reinvigorated my belief in the value of Language Nest-style programs for Australia. I look forward to sharing the important evidence and energy that I have returned home with among Australian linguistic, education, reconciliation and community development networks alike.

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A note on brevity

“Brevity is the key to the Fellowship Report” – I remember reading this advice in my final pre-departure email from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust’s Chief Executive Officer, Adam Davey. Indeed, despite being a languages-focused project, and despite my corresponding love of words, this Report has in many ways shaped up to be briefer than I may have initially anticipated, with a number of Fellowship findings situated outside of the scope of this Report. This is not at all to suggest that my Fellowship learnings were minimal; rather, it is a result of the following important factors:

- Some of the cultural-linguistic principles embedded in Language Nest practices cannot be adequately or appropriately translated into written English. On a similar note, there are some cultural-linguistic learnings that I, as a non-Indigenous individual, do not feel it is my place to describe in depth in the absence of appropriate Indigenous co-authorship.
- Many insights and inspirations on my journey were based on socio-emotional experiences rather than intellectual inquiry. As such, it does not particularly serve to communicate these on paper, but instead through direct exchanges between people.
- The generosity of my overseas hosts was incredible, and many shared with me more than I could ever have asked for or expected. To respect privacy/confidentiality considerations, certain pieces of information are perhaps best passed on through securely arranged personal conversations, rather than via an open online publication.
- Appreciating the value of brevity as a literary device, I hope to facilitate the accessibility and readability of this Report as best possible.

Given the above points, interested readers are encouraged to contact the author for further insights and information, or to be directed to other appropriate sources of information. There are certainly many minute but meaningful details that may not have made their way into this Report, but are well worthy of sharing in other manners or media.

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A further comment regarding brevity is that, due to the limits on the time spent on each leg of my Churchill Fellowship journey, this Report cannot be claimed to represent a whole-scale survey of Language Nests either intra- or inter-nationally. However, it is based on strong case studies within each of the countries visited, and works to provide a meaningful and practical overview of key learnings accordingly.

Finally, in reflecting on the notion of brevity, I am reminded of Churchill’s famous quote, “Broadly speaking, the short words are the best, and the old words best of all,” calling for succinctness, and for the use of simple words – those that are known to everyone from a young age. That is, Churchill recognised that often it is often our short, first-learned words that become the most emotionally-loaded, instinctive vocabulary, organically expressed in response to feelings rather than through unproductive overthinking. In the context of this Report, I would like to challenge readers to consider the value of First Languages— those Indigenous languages across the globe that preceded even the Old English language— as being the truly powerful ‘old words,’ with continuing contemporary significance.
Google Maps representation of my Churchill Fellowship travel programme, highlighting the main cities, towns or villages I based myself in in each of my destination countries. As captured in the ‘Programme Highlights’ sections of this Report, note that some internal travel to neighbouring or farther-reaching locations was also involved during some of my visits.

**Leg #1: New Zealand**  
July 23 – August 6, 2017

**Leg #2: USA**  
August 6 – August 19, 2017

**Leg #3: Canada**  
August 20 – 31, 2017
Learnings from Leg #1: New Zealand

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Meeting with representatives from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust

Following a beautifully heart-warming mihi whakatau, I had the opportunity to take a tour of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust head office and meet the dedicated staffing team. Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust was established in 1982 (formalised as a charitable trust in 1983) with a mission to maintain and strengthen Māori language and philosophies within a meaningful cultural framework, targeting the immersive and intergenerational involvement of mokopuna and whānau in the kōhanga reo movement. My visit to the head office also coincided with a gathering of the newly elected Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust Board Members, so I was incredibly fortunate to simultaneously meet those who represent the governing body, guardians and guides of the kōhanga reo movement. My visit was mentored by Dr Arapera Royal Tangaere, who has worked for Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust for more than twenty years, and has both children and grandchildren who have been raised and educated through kōhanga reo and the corresponding kaupapa Māori. I am endlessly grateful to Arapera for the warmth and wisdom she shared. Indeed, it is important to appreciate that many of the key learnings captured in this Report have been relayed with strong reference to the words and wisdom that Arapera – and all other key contacts mentioned in this Programme Highlights section – generously shared with me firsthand. Some of my many learnings from Arapera are also echoed in her doctoral thesis, Te Hokinga Ki Te Ūkaipō: A socio-cultural construction of Māori language development: Kōhanga Reo and home, which I would encourage readers of this Report to further engage with.

Upon invitation, I made a further, return visit to Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust head office to informally present some of my own Australia-based Language Nest experiences to kaiako from in and around the Wellington area. This was an important reminder of the fact that, while Australia has much it can learn from language revitalisation initiatives internationally, it also has much to offer, and even some of the most established Language Nest programs can continually learn and grow through exchanging insights and inspiration with others.

Learning about the role of Tari-a-Rohe (Kahungunu example)

Branching from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust head office are six Tari-a-Rohe10, each focused on a particular regional area of Aotearoa and the kōhanga reo and purapura within that region. Staff at these regional offices have roles dedicated mainly to providing support and advice regarding training matters, as well as the operational obligations of whānau management. Thanks to the generosity of representatives from the Kahungunu Tari-a-Rohe, I was able to engage in a wonderful presentation of the work history and highlights of this particular regional example.

Visiting Te Kōhanga Reo o Ngā Mokopuna

Guided by Dr Arapera Royal Tangaere, I was thrilled to make a half-day visit to Te Kōhanga Reo o Ngā Mokopuna to see, and get a real feel for, a Wellington-based kōhanga reo learning environment in

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9 Out of respect for the importance of First Languages, much of the remainder of this Report will refer to New Zealand as Aotearoa, the most commonly accepted name for the entire country of New Zealand in te reo Māori.
10 Specifically, there are ten offices across six rohe/regions.
action. It was so enlightening and encouraging to be able to observe and join in on children’s learning firsthand, as well as to be able to share stories and experiences with the lead kaiako.

**Visiting the Te Wānanga Whare Tapere o Takitimu complex**

The Te Wānanga Whare Tapere o Takitimu complex is an inspiring example of effective succession planning in support of long-term and sustainable linguistic-cultural learning. Following a lifelong learning (“womb to tomb”) approach to language revitalisation, the complex is an incredible site of intergenerational language immersion, with programs offered from the early childhood right through to tertiary level. Programs include:

- Te Wānanga Whare Tapere o Takitimu Performing Arts School (tertiary level, founded in 1983);
- Te Kōhanga Reo o Te Wānanga Whare Tapere o Takitimu (preschool level, established in 1991);
- Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Wānanga Whare Tapere o Takitimu (primary school level, established in 1994 and officially gazetted in 1996);
- Wharekura (secondary school level, gazetted in 2016);
- Community courses such as Kura Raumati (a two-week intensive summer school program for all ages above 8 years, focused on the basics of Māori performing arts) and Taikura (a 55+ years program for those wishing to learn and celebrate te reo Māori through song and dance).

As well as being welcomed through a beautiful pōwhiri, involving students across the different learning areas of the complex, I am forever thankful for the way in which I was made welcome and mentored by Heke Huata and Matua Hook during this visit. Heke and Matua have been driving forces behind the complex’s Kōhanga Reo since its beginnings, and it was so humbling to get to know them and their work.

Heke’s father, Canon Wi Huata, was one of the original leaders of the kōhanga reo movement, as well as one of the first Board Members of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust. Heke has herself worked for the National Trust in a Board Member capacity, and in informing strategy and relationships for a number of years. Following a recent election process, Matua decided to honour the decision of those who put his name forward by joining the National Trust Board this year. Having the opportunity to share kōrero with Heke, Matua and their team, and observe the work of Te Kōhanga Reo o Te Wānanga Whare Tapere o Takitimu across a couple of days, was a really special way of familiarising with some of the many facets of everyday Language Nest operations and their positive outcomes.

**Meeting with Jeremy Tātere MacLeod to learn about Te Kōhanga Reo o Mere Kārena, and his wider language revitalisation work with Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Inc.**

Jeremy Tātere MacLeod was born and raised in Brisbane, Australia, but, driven by a desire to better connect with his Māori heritage, made the decision to move to Aotearoa in his early adulthood. Since then, he has been dedicated to the revitalisation of te reo Māori in a number of different ways and on a number of different levels. Jeremy kindly invited me to catch the morning session at his home-based kōhanga reo, Te Kōhanga Reo o Mere Kārena. Having only been in operation since late last year, Te Kōhanga Reo o Mere Kārena is the newest kōhanga reo in the Kahungunu region, so it was a great opportunity to observe the practice of, and listen to perspectives around, a program in its earlier roll-out stage. I also had the chance to hear about Jeremy’s wider language revitalisation work, such as in his role of Director of Te Reo, Tikanga & Mātauranga at Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Inc., a governing body for all aspects of tribe development in the region. Correspondingly, we spoke about the significant nexus between culturally responsive educational development, native language development, and community development more broadly, as well as the importance of finding a positive balance between top-down and bottom-up approaches to language revitalisation. Furthermore, Jeremy left me with some really salient words of advice: not to forget to “inspire the inspirers” – to maintain the energy and momentum.
of those who represent driving forces behind language revitalisation work by making the point and time to reflect on, recognise and celebrate First Languages and any progress made towards supporting their survival into the future.

Meeting with Professor Rawinia Higgins, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Māori) at Te Wānanga Whare o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui Victoria University of Wellington

Professor Rawinia Higgins has contributed greatly to the revitalisation of te reo Māori throughout her career. As well as having strong relationships with Māori communities on the ground, she has been a representative on key panels and working parties, such as in her capacity of Board Member of Te Māngai Pāho and Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga Centre of Research Excellence, a Member of the Waitangi Tribunal, and a Commissioner for Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (the Māori Language Commission). While meeting with Professor Higgins at the Victoria University of Wellington, where she is currently in the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Māori), I was able to learn about her additional involvement in the recent development of Te Ture mō te Reo Māori 2016 (the Māori Language Act 2016). We also spoke about the importance of attitudinal shift in the context of language revitalisation – the idea that, just as raising non-Indigenous people’s awareness and appreciation of the importance of First Languages is crucial, so too can Indigenous people benefit from processes of ‘de-colonising’ their mindset. That is, to (re)build positive meaning and momentum behind language revitalisation initiatives, it is important to support Indigenous people to pull away from deficit colonial discourses that they may have internalised. Recognising that people can be positively and productively bi-cultural – able to achieve as well as any other modern-day citizen in any arena, all the while maintaining a connection to traditional language and culture – can really help to normalise and nurture the continuation of First Languages into the future.

Visiting the Te Tiriti o Waitangi: Ngā tohu kotahitanga (Treaty of Waitangi: Signs of a nation) exhibition at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

Visiting this exhibition provided some valuable insights into the politico-legal context of First Languages in Aotearoa, specifically regarding the Treaty of Waitangi. That is, while te reo Māori is enshrined as a taonga (treasure) in the Treaty, the exhibition expressed some of the issues of translation. For example, it highlighted that, due to the arguably rushed or hasty pace at which the Treaty of Waitangi was translated into te reo Māori, as well as the questions and complexities of intercultural communication more generally, a number of translation, miscommunication and misunderstanding-related issues continue to be raised and worked towards being resolved to this day. The exhibition also made a comment about how the Treaty was almost (accidentally) burnt in a fire only about a year after it came into being, and about how the original copy has long been water-damaged and rat-eaten – perhaps a telling indication of historical colonial attitudes towards the Māori people of Aotearoa and their linguistic-cultural interrelationships.
KŌHANGA REO: SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNINGS

LANGUAGE GUIDE

Listed below are some te reo Māori terms that may commonly crop up in kōhanga reo-related conversations. Note that the translations do not necessarily represent direct or exact English equivalents. They are intended to serve only as rough guides for readers, unable to perfectly capture the sometimes highly complex, sophisticated and multi-layered Māori linguistic-cultural concepts. Indeed, many of my hosts in Aotearoa preferred to maintain the use of te reo Māori terminology in explanatory conversations, precisely because translated English expressions didn’t feel entirely adequate.

- Aotearoa – New Zealand (more literally: ‘long white cloud’)
- Aroha – unconditional love or respect
- Atawhai – deep kindness and care
- Atua – God; spiritual/supernatural guardian
- Hapū – sub-tribe
- Hui – gathering; meeting; congress
- Iwi – tribe
- Kaiako – teacher
- Kaiāwhina – helper (paid or voluntary)
- Kaimahi – staff member (paid or voluntary)
- Karakia – prayer; incantation
- Kaumātua – Elder
- Kaupapa – philosophical doctrine
- Koha – donation; voluntary contribution
- Kōhanga reo – language nest
- Kōrero – conversation; story
- Korowai – cloak (woven and decorated and traditionally worn by Māori Chiefs)
- Kura – school (primary level)
- Mana – power; spiritual or supernatural force within a person, place or object
- Manaakitanga – hospitality; generosity
- Marae – traditional tribal meeting place
- Mihi – greeting
- Mihi whakatau – formal/official welcoming speech
- Mokopuna – grandchildren (also the way in which children participating in kōhanga reo are often affectionately referred to)
- Pākehā – non-Māori; non-Indigenous
- Pakiwaitara – story; legend
- Pepehā – recitation of genealogy
- Pou – pillar
- Poutama – stepped pattern sometimes woven into traditional mats (also symbolising a kind of ‘staircase’ to superior knowledge)
- Pōwhiri – welcoming ceremony
- Purapura – cluster of kōhanga reo
- Tamaki – children

11 Note also that, while I have listed most of the rough translations in their singular form, most te reo Māori nouns maintain the same spelling in their plural forms.
BRIEF BACKGROUND

Te reo Māori was spoken right across Aotearoa for hundreds of years prior to British colonisation. While dialectical variations in the language can distinguish certain geographical locations or iwi groups, a shared understanding of, and identification with, the language has long existed between speakers from all over the country.

When the Treaty of Waitangi was signed by representatives of the British Crown and a number of Māori chiefs in 1840, it was formally agreed that Māori people would be guaranteed “full exclusive and undisturbed possession”\(^\text{12}\) or “\(\text{tino rangatiratanga}\)” (absolute chieftainship) over their \(\text{taonga}\) (prized possessions or treasures, including intangible treasures such as language). Nevertheless, due to colonial policies and practices of assimilation, it took only a little over a single century following the formation of a colonial government for te reo Māori to cease to be the first language spoken within many Māori homes.

It was during a \(\text{hui kaumātua}\), convened by the Department of Māori Affairs in 1979, as well as amidst the discussions and endorsements that followed in a subsequent series of \(\text{Wānanga Whakatauria}\), that Māori Elders and community leaders formally pushed for the survival of te reo Māori to be made their top priority. In response, a national body committed to protecting te reo Māori and promoting the importance of immersing children and their families in the language was established in 1982, registered as \(\text{Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust}\) the following year. The first \(\text{kōhanga reo}\), Pukeatua, was officially opened in Wainuiomata 1982 and, today, there are more than four hundred and sixty \(\text{kōhanga reo}\) across Aotearoa\(^\text{13}\), catering to more than nine thousand children. While the current number of \(\text{kōhanga reo}\) is not representative of the record numbers operating during the peak of the \(\text{kohanga reo}\) movement (before responsibility of the movement was transferred to the Ministry of Education in 1990, coinciding with the disestablishment of the Department of Māori Affairs), the significant, continued activity of \(\text{kōhanga reo}\) over several decades is certainly something to recognise, celebrate and learn from.

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\(^{13}\) There are even examples of \(\text{kōhanga reo}\) operating outside of Aotearoa. For example, Te Kōhanga Reo – Polhakena is operated in the south-western suburbs of Sydney. It operates not so much as a licenced/registered preschool provider but, rather, as a kind of social and community service program under an umbrella organisation, IndigenousWise Incorporated.
POLITICO-LEGAL CONTEXT

It is worth pointing out that kōhanga reo in Aotearoa are very much described as belonging to a ‘movement.’ Indeed, one of the kaiako I was fortunate enough to meet with expressed that children attending the kōhanga reo where she taught essentially assumed roles as “peaceful protestors,” meaningfully pushing for the de-colonisation and reclamation of their linguistic-cultural identities and learning philosophies by the very nature of participating in the kōhanga reo each day.

The ‘Brief Background’ section above touches on the past and present politico-legal context of the kōhanga reo movement, the beginnings of which were particularly bolstered by the hui kaumātua of 1979. Other prime examples of pre- and post-1979 politico-legal matters which have intersected with the kōhanga reo movement – whether adversely or advantageously – are listed below:

• **Introduction of the Native Schools Act (1867)**

Shaped by colonial attitudes aimed at ‘civilising’ and ‘anglicising’ Māori children and their communities, the introduction of the Native Schools Act (1867) has, historically, had a huge impact in terms of the marginalisation of te reo Māori. That is, it was under this piece of legislation that English, rather than te reo Māori, was formally imposed as the language of instruction within the education system.

Aligned to the Native Schools Act, a Native Schools Code was further issued in 1880, prescribing and standardising the operations of native schools, as well as the curriculum content to be taught to Māori students. Instruction in te reo Māori was only minimally permitted for students in their very early school years, and only if it could be rationalised according to a logic of assisting children’s English language learning.

The longstanding implementation of both the Act and the Code can be strongly connected to the rapid demise of te reo Māori since British colonisation in Aotearoa.

• **Presentation of the Ngā Tamatoa petition (1972)**

In 1972, an activist group comprised predominantly of Māori University students, Ngā Tamatoa, collected more than three hundred thousand signatures to be presented as a petition to the Crown, pushing for te reo Māori to be reintroduced in schools. A national Māori Language Day was declared on the date (September 14th) that the petition was handed over to the Crown, which has now evolved into Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori (Māori Language Week), celebrated in the same month each year since 1975. The petition further formed the foundations for te reo Māori to be accepted as part of the curriculum in most schools, with the first bilingual school opening in Rūātoki in 1978.

It is important to point out that that the activist efforts of Ngā Tamatoa did not exist in isolation. They were indeed propelled by the work of preceding lobby groups such as the Māori Education Foundation, the Māori Women’s Welfare League and the New Zealand Māori Council which, since about the 1950s, recognised the grave state of te reo Māori and began advocating for the situation to be redressed and reversed. Together, these activism efforts combined to build the basis of the political climate within which the kōhanga reo movement – and parallel movements or policy frameworks similarly centred on whānau mobilisation and self-management, and on immersion-based approaches to language revitalisation – later emerged.

• **Establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal (1975 – more than a century after its signing in 1840)**

Despite some of the aforementioned issues around the Treaty of Waitangi’s translation and implementation over time, the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal as a permanent commission of

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14 Such as Te Ataarangi and Tū Tangata, to give just a couple of examples.
inquiry has opened up important legal processes for the *kōhanga reo* and wider language revitalisation movement in Aotearoa.

Two Tribunal claims that have been particularly pertinent with regard to *kōhanga reo* include:

- the Te Reo Māori Claim: lodged by Ngā Kaiwhakapūmau i te Reo (the Wellington Māori Language Board) in 1984, this claim asserted that te reo Māori was among the *taonga* enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty of Waitangi and that the Crown therefore had a responsibility to respect and protect it. As such, the Māori Language Act (1987 – see details below) ensued in response to this claim.

- the Kōhanga Reo Claim: put forward by representatives from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust in 2011 with an application for an urgent inquiry, this claim alleged that, particularly through the integration of *kōhanga reo* within the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector since 1990, the Crown had failed to uniquely and adequately recognise the distinct *kaupapa* of te reo Māori revitalisation, instead unilaterally and unjustly treating *kōhanga reo* as standard ECE providers. Accordingly, the claim explained that, with regard to regulatory compliance, partnership relations and finances alike, multiple compromises and sacrifices had become required of *kōhanga reo* whānau and the National Trust, leading to declines in the number of *kōhanga reo* environments and the number of children enrolled within them. Indeed, the Report on the Claim found that “the Crown’s failures to address the place of *kōhanga reo* has led to actions and omissions inconsistent with the principles of the Treaty, namely the principles of: partnership; the guarantee of *rangatiratanga*; the obligations on the Crown to make efficient and effective policy and to actively protect te reo Māori in ECE through *kōhanga reo*; and the principle of equity.”¹⁵ While strategies for acting on the claim’s findings are still being negotiated and yet to be formally implemented, the Report on the Claim makes five overarching recommendations, recognising that “urgent steps are needed to address recent Crown policy failures if te reo Māori is to survive”¹⁶ and that these steps are simultaneously important to the process of reconciliation between Crown and Māori parties. To learn more about the events leading up to the Kōhanga Reo Claim, the evidence put forward, and the suggestions for next steps following the claim’s success, I would strongly recommend reading the full and final (2013) publication of *Matua Rautia: The Report on the Kōhanga Reo Claim*.


As mentioned, the 1979 *hui kaumātua* was followed by a series of Wānanga Whakatauria – conferences working to bring Māori *kaumātua* and people across all age groups together to discuss matters of concern and propose how the Department of Māori Affairs may be able to productively communicate these concerns to government. It was discussions and decisions arising out of the 1980 Wānanga Whakatauria that specifically drove the passing of a resolution that requested the Department of Māori Affairs make te reo Māori preservation its first and foremost priority.

- **Passing of the Māori Language Act (1987) and the new Māori Language Act (2016), after the former was repealed**

Resulting from the Te Reo Māori Waitangi Tribunal claim, the Māori Language Act was passed in 1987, in turn declaring te reo Māori to be an official language of New Zealand, permitting te reo Māori to be spoken in certain legal proceedings, and establishing Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (the Māori Language Commission). The Act has also served as a precursory platform for the development of Māori broadcasting policies and programs.

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In 2016, the Act was repealed and replaced by Te Ture mō te Reo Māori, a new Māori Language Act. While this new legislation continues to see Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori operate as an autonomous Crown entity, it has also formalised the establishment of Te Mātāwai, an independent statutory entity with a role of leading te reo Māori revitalisation on behalf of Māori individuals and their iwi. As discussed with Professor Rawinia Higgins, some of the challenges and opportunities ahead of Te Mātāwai members include moving beyond politics and bureaucracy to allow the entity to influence meaningful and practical change, as well as pushing for policies drafted under the legislation to be based on recognised language acquisition theory and evidence, in-depth community consultation, and an understanding of the place of diversity and flexibility in language revitalisation contexts.

- **Release of the Education Amendment Act (1989)**

Based on the review and reforms resulting from the Education Amendment Act (1989), *kura kaupapa Māori* became formally recognised schooling systems, legitimising post-preschool language learning opportunities for *kōhanga reo* graduates at the legislative level. Note that a further Education (Update) Amendment Act has come into effect just this year, with updates intended to gradually take effect between May 2017 and January 2020.

Overall, those I had the opportunity to meet with in Aotearoa almost unanimously asserted that responsive politico-legal initiatives (particularly the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal and the conferral of official language status on te reo Māori) have represented key mechanisms in supporting the success of the *kōhanga reo movement*. At the same time, there was also a clear consensus that the *kōhanga reo movement* would continue to push on even in the absence of positive political-legal infrastructure, driven by the people power at the movement’s core.

**GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES/SUPPORT**

At the micro-level, each *kōhanga reo* very much operates according to a *whānau* management model. Here, *whānau* refers not only to the individual or immediate families of children attending a *kōhanga reo*, but more so to how these *whānau* combine to create a wider ‘language nest family’ as its own kind of extended kinship entity. Effectively, members of a *kōhanga reo whānau* represent the key decision-makers on the ground, and are each called on to assume active roles and responsibilities relating to the everyday running of the *kōhanga reo* environment. Whether remunerated or voluntary in nature, these roles range from joining the teaching team as a trained *kaiko*, to taking on a wider *kaimahi/kaiōwhina* responsibility as a support carer/educator, cleaner, *cook*, treasurer, or fundraiser, to give just a few examples. *Whānau* meetings are also held, often about once a month, to discuss ongoing and newly arising matters pertaining to planning and management, as well as to share further time, stories and learning together. Across Aotearoa are also more than one hundred *purapura* – clusters of *kōhanga reo* within close proximity to each other, members of which come together (again, often on a monthly or otherwise regular basis) to exchange insights and experiences, schedule joint events, and provide support and advice to any *kōhanga reo* within the same *purapura* that are struggling in any way.

*Whānau* and *purapura* decisions around the design and delivery of *kōhanga reo* initiatives are expected to be consistently based on the children’s best interest. In this way, it is the children who are often described as being the true ‘bosses’ or ‘leaders’ of the *kōhanga reo movement*. The special place of *kaumātua* is also to be respected, particularly with regard to the governance of, and guidance around, te reo Māori and the *kaupapa* and *tikanga* Māori to which the language is tied.

In order for a *kōhanga reo* to be formally recognised and licensed, the *kōhanga reo whānau* must work as a collective to shape and submit its own *Tūhanga* or Charter to Te Kōhanaga Reo National Trust Board (through the relevant Tari-a-Rohe) for endorsement. The Charter is expected to encapsulate the
guiding principles, special goals and suggested practices outlined in *Te Korowai*, an essential document described to me as the “bible” or “covenant” for the *kōhanga reo* movement. At the core of *Te Korowai* are four key *pou* of the *kōhanga reo kaupapa*:

1. Total immersion in te reo Māori in *kōhanga reo* daily operations (no compromises);
2. *Whānau* decision-making, management and responsibility;
3. Accountability;
4. Health and wellbeing of the *mokopuna* and the *whānau.*

These four *pou* have remained consistent throughout the course of the *kōhanga reo* movement, maintaining a strong sense of integrity in terms of the movement’s governance and management approach. It is also important to point out that, while developed internally by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, *Te Korowai* was co-signed by the Ministry of Education in 1995, thereby serving as an important Memorandum of Understanding between these two institutions, and on behalf of all *kōhanga reo*.

At the macro-level, it is thus Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust (and its regional office branches) that represents the main governing body of the wider *kōhanga reo* movement. Since its formalisation as a charitable trust in 1983, it has greatly supported *kōhanga reo whānau* through the management of matters such as training and professional development; property acquisition and administration; child health insurance co-ordination; financial audit investigation, loan provisions and scholarship programming; as well as reporting to, allocating funds from, and furthering relationships with, the Ministry of Education. Such support allows *kōhanga reo whānau* to better be able to focus on the important and immediate work that they are carrying out with children on the ground, rather than being overly caught up in bureaucratic, administrative and financial concerns, and any associated issues of capacity or accessibility.

Drawing on tools of accountability, resourcing, and monitoring and evaluation, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust is currently committed to a long-term (2008-2033) strategic plan, *Te Ara Tūāpae*, which outlines the Trust’s overarching objectives, as well as a series of specific actions towards achieving these. Examples of strategic objectives include normalising and not compromising *te reo* Māori; assuring *kōhanga* quality, upskilling and alignment with *Te Korowai*; nurturing and empowering *mokopuna* and their *whānau*; and growing and strengthening the *kōhanga reo* movement while recognising its uniqueness and promoting its *kaupapa.*

Just this year, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust finalised a new election process around Board of Trustee membership. While Board membership was originally envisaged to be a lifelong role (or at least as long as a Member’s health saw fit), the new election process was introduced as an initiative for increasing accountability and transparency. Each *purapura* was first given the opportunity to nominate a prospective Board representative and then, once these names were put forward, each *kōhanga reo* was given one valid vote.

As well as being accountable to *kōhanga reo whānau* across Aotearoa (and vice versa), the Te Kōhanga Reo Board of Trustees maintains a relationship of reciprocal accountability with the Ministry of Education, which became the government body to assume responsibility of the *kōhanga reo* movement after the Department of Māori Affairs was disestablished in 1989. Of course, on the consultative, policy and regulatory level, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust and each of the *kōhanga reo* that it represents can also intersect with, and be influenced by, other institutions and governing groups such as the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA); Tertiary Education Commission (TEC); Education

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19 Note that this transfer of responsibility took place without consultation with Te Kōhanaga Reo National Trust or kōhanga reo whānau.
University of Auckland, <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/13392>

Children’s everyday learning and play is in many ways scaffolded by language. Such opportunities are provided to empower children to take ownership of their own learning, and to graduate from their kōhanga reo environment feeling proud and assured of the significance of their language, culture and selves.

Children’s everyday learning and play is in many ways scaffolded by kaiako modelling a Māori grandparent-grandchild education and care relationship. That is, as well as encouraging the physical

PHILOSOPHIES, PROTOCOLS AND PEDAGOGIES

Alongside the four pou echoed through Te Korowai are a number of other philosophies, protocols and pedagogies of significance to kōhanga reo practice.

For example, in both personal communication and in her thesis, Dr Arapera Royal Tangaere emphasises the importance of embedding perspectives pertaining to traditional tikanga (customs), whakapapa (genealogy) and whanaungatanga (socio-cultural interrelationships, and associated values of manaakitanga (generosity of hospitality), aroha (unconditional love and respect) and atawhai (deep kindness and care)) in everyday kōhanga reo operations.

Accordingly, regular daily routines or rituals that I was able to observe include:

- Group greeting (mihimihi) sessions;
- The recitation of one’s genealogy (pepehā) before the group, often involving the identification of ancestral canoes, mountains or water bodies that the individual and his/her family is connected to;
- Singing or chanting prayers/incantations (karakia);
- Singing traditional songs (waiata), often with accompanying actions to reinforce the lyrics’ meaning;
- Listening to culturally significant stories or legends (pakiwaitara).

These ritualised activities are purposefully scheduled between both dramatic and general play, and alongside standard sleep and feeding time requirements.

The precise selection or wording of routine songs, prayers or stories may be subject to some variation, depending on the tribal area within which a kōhanga reo is located, or on any faith-based framework that the kōhanga reo whānau has chosen to subscribe to. The repetition of these routines serves not only as a pedagogical strategy to support te reo Māori memorisation, but also as a vehicle for securing the ongoing transmission of important cultural meanings and messages. In this way, what is seen from a Māori perspective as an intricate interrelationship between past, present and future is also reinforced and reified through routine. Many kaiako I spoke with also explained how clear and consistent routines supported children to feel well settled and assured in their learning environments. I was genuinely impressed with the confidence and competence with which children actively participated in the abovementioned daily rituals, indeed often given the opportunity to take turns in leading the sessions. Such opportunities are provided to empower children to take ownership of their own learning, and to graduate from their kōhanga reo environment feeling proud and assured of the significance of their language, culture and selves.

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presence of kaumātua within kōhanga reo environments, kaiako work to embody and enact the kind of responsibility and affection that a grandparent would share with his/her grandchildren. Even the common practice of endearingly referring to children in attendance as “mokopuna” (grandchildren) rather than simply “tamariki” (children) reinforces this model relationship. It is in a similar manner that older child attendees are encouraged to form supportive bonds or buddy-type systems with their younger peers, demonstrating a culturally respectable tuakana-teina (older person-younger person interrelationship) once again. Such relationships were strongly apparent in my observations, whereby older children would amiably and obligingly take the initiative to share toys with younger children; comfort younger children when upset; or support those not yet of speaking age through mihimihī and pepehā sessions. It is important to point out that these relationships are also defined by a level of role reversal and reciprocity, however. That is, the kōhanga reo focus on intergenerational, lifelong learning, and the belief in not only the pertinent place of Elders but also the empowerment of children as Elders of the future, has largely led to an accepted ‘teacher-as-learner’ and ‘learner-as-teacher’ pedagogical approach.

In terms of facilitating full language immersion, the ‘no compromise’ protocol is integral to the kōhanga reo movement. Should kaiako need to converse among themselves or with others in English, they are to do so only in designated English-speaking areas, away from children’s auditory reach. The aim is for children to identify kaiako and wider kōhanga reo staff as te reo Māori-only speakers so that the English language is not recognised as a crutch to revert to. In my experience, visitors without sufficient te reo Māori speaking skills are nevertheless permitted to use any other language other than English in front of the children. Doing so helps to further demonstrate to children that it can be both normal and acceptable to speak non-English languages. As the children are also unlikely to identify with a non-English language other than te reo Māori, they are also unlikely to revert to it at the cost of their te reo Māori learning.

At the kōhanga reo level, the focus is generally on children’s te reo Māori listening and speaking skills more so than on reading and writing ability, the latter becoming a stronger focus as children reach primary school age and enter kura kaupapa Māori environments. Kaiako work towards providing rich aural input for children so as to promote subsequent oral output. Efforts are not concentrated on explicit teaching, but rather on supporting organic learning in a similar manner to which a child would learn his/her home language simply by being naturally surrounded by it. Children are thus made to feel comfortably nurtured in their language learning environment, with the use of te reo Māori being further normalised in this way. Children are not overtly criticised if they speak English, or explicitly corrected if their te reo Māori is imperfect – instead, kaiako may politely remind children of the imperative to speak te reo Māori, and supportively repeat the most accurate phrasing. Such positive reinforcement helps to remind children, at the socio-emotional and attitudinal level, that speaking te reo Māori to any degree of fluency is indeed a positive thing. Correspondingly, participating in kōhanga reo becomes much more than a means of engaging in preschool education and language learning. It is about holistic child development, and the (re)affirmation of the complex fabric that makes up children’s linguistic-cultural identities.

In all, the general assertion is that, if kōhanga reo kaiako and wider whānau maintain a genuine commitment to the kaupapa Māori, and make genuine efforts to meaningfully embed the kaupapa in practice, the kōhanga reo movement will successfully ensue.

21 Nonetheless, while attending kōhanga reo, children may be indirectly introduced to written forms of te reo Māori in storybooks and on display walls, for example.
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

As well as referring to a (bird) ‘nest,’ the term ‘kōhanga’ is also the name given to a traditional Māori birthing site/shelter. Drawing on this metaphorical imagery, the aim is for a kōhanga reo environment to be a place where younglings are naturally protected, nurtured and positively enabled to grow. Just as a mother bird provides mouth-to-mouth feeding to her fledglings, so too is the idea for te reo Māori to be fed directly to the mouths of children in kōhanga reo from the earliest age.

When the kōhanga reo movement was in its infancy, many kōhanga reo environments were simply established in family homes or on tribal marae. This is still sometimes the case, but many kōhanga reo now operate on their own separate sites, or on shared grounds with a kura kaupapa Māori. At times, to help to create a welcoming atmosphere, kōhanga reo building designs will incorporate elements reflecting the layout or look of traditional marae. More often than not, however, kōhanga reo are simple, unassuming physical settings, based on a belief that it is most important to invest in the socio-emotional and educational environment stimulated inside the building. As the kōhanga reo movement itself grew from humble and honest beginnings, discouraging egotistical motivations from impinging on the important, community-oriented core of language revitalisation work, an essence of humility and honesty is often correspondingly reflected in kōhanga reo physical spaces. Similarly, with children at the centre of kōhanga reo activities, whānau are reminded to base their property management decisions on the best interests of child attendees – if a building design or furniture item isn’t clearly connected to children’s education and care, one should critically question whether it should be prioritised or purchased.

As with children’s learning routines, the physical environment is also encouraged to be purposive – to have a culturally responsive meaning or message behind it, and to effectively play a role in reflecting and reinforcing children’s learning experiences. Even if subtly, emphasis is given to supporting children to ‘see’ and ‘feel’ themselves and their culture represented in the physical environment, whether through proudly displaying children’s work samples or family trees, or by incorporating visual imagery of significant sites, atua or tipuna, for example. Furthermore, strategies such as plastering key te reo Māori words, pronouns and proverbs around the room, and ensuring the separate zoning of English-speaking areas, are just a couple of examples of purposefully promoting language immersion in a physical sense.

Some kōhanga reo whānau have intentionally worked to create a clear degree of consistency between their indoor and outdoor kōhanga reo settings. That is, the same images, design features or layouts may be replicated across indoor and outdoor spaces, drawing on repetition as a pedagogical tool, and further serving to suggest that Māori linguistic-cultural learning should be able to continue naturally, regardless of the context within which it takes place. In a related manner, the choice to take kōhanga reo attendees on excursions (to appropriate Māori exhibitions or celebratory events, or to engage in activities such as collecting traditional food and medicine materials) not only provides practical opportunities for children to extend their learning, but can also act to remind children that speaking – and being – Māori has a positive place in their wider life-world. Furthermore, depending on what a kōhanga reo whānau considers most feasible or favourable, excursions may be coordinated in addition to, or instead of, excursions. To share just one example, inviting health professionals into the physical space can allow for health issues that may affect language learning (such as those relating to a child’s hearing and speech) to be helpfully monitored, mitigated, and managed on an effective early intervention basis.\footnote{Note that services such as general health check-ups and dentistry are also freely provided by the government for children of kōhanga reo age (0-5 years), meaning that these kinds of excursions do not have to come at a cost to the kōhanga reo whānau.} Such an incursion can also send a message that the ‘outside world’ is interested and invested in what happens within kōhanga reo, and can positively reinforce the idea that kōhanga reo philosophies promote holistic learning and wellbeing.
The question of access is one final aspect of significance when it comes to kōhanga reo physical environments. So that a child is not physically marginalised from attending a kōhanga reo, it is very common for kōhanga reo whānau to offer daily pick-up and drop-off services. Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust is also actively involved in the provision of manageable loans for the purchase of vehicles, should a kōhanga reo whānau benefit from such support. At the same time, aligned to the pou of accountability, there are some kōhanga reo whānau who expect parents/carers to personally bring in their children. Such an expectation encourages parents to demonstrate a direct engagement with, and physical presence among, the whānau that they have chosen to be a part of, and so in turn prove their commitment to the wider kōhanga reo movement.

As an overarching comment, careful attention to the physical environment is an integral component of kōhanga reo design and operations, particularly given the physical environment’s important interrelationship with the socio-emotional and cultural-educational environment. Moreover, as Arapera Royal Tangaere importantly reminded me upon reviewing this Report, a child’s kōhanga reo education is about much more than learning occurring within a building or physical structure; it is also about embracing Papatūānuku, the earth mother, as a culturally, socio-emotionally and spiritually sustaining learning environment.

**STAFFING, EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In assuming responsibility of the kōhanga reo movement in 1990, the Ministry of Education instituted a requirement for appropriate staff qualifications to be attained before a kōhanga reo could be adequately licenced and access ECE funding from the Ministry accordingly. As such, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust has worked to develop five unique training courses that are specifically tailored to the roles involved in running kōhanga reo. The Ministry of Education has formally acknowledged the right of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust to set its highest level (Level 7) course as the accepted teaching qualification for kōhanga reo kaiako. Colloquially known by its shortened name, “Whakapakari,” the Level 7 diploma course is also among a suite of Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust courses, four of which have been formally approved by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). It focuses on a strong command of te reo Māori and, as well as integrating research and cultural theories, involves intensive practical components centred on working with children and the wider kōhanga reo whānau. It is generally considered a three-year course, and some disheartenment has been expressed around the fact that it has tended to have been recognised or accredited under the ‘Humanities’ rather than ‘hard Education’ discipline. The three other NZQA-approved courses include two designed for kōhanga reo whānau members with limited te reo Māori proficiency and one which has been shaped to suit those interested in the small business management side of kōhanga reo operations.

Entry into a course such as Whakapakari generally requires a student to be nominated, and have their application approved, by their kōhanga reo whānau. In a similar vein, alongside the attainment of formal training qualifications, it is typically seen as important for kaiako to undergo a process of attestation by their kōhanga reo whānau before stepping into their teaching positions. During this process, whānau members will decide on whether the prospective kaiako has an acceptable level of te reo Māori fluency, and whether they represent suitable educators and role models for the mokopuna who will be in their care.

Kaiako-child ratios determine the number of kōhanga reo staff required by the Ministry of Education to have completed their Whakapakari course (or indeed the Ministry-accepted combination of staff in their final Whakapakari training year; undertaking either of the one-year, language-oriented certificate courses; and/or having undergone the attestation process). Despite the fact that courses designed and

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23 Full course title is Te Tohu Mātauranga Whakapakari Tino Rangatiratanga.
delivered by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust have been formally recognised, qualified kaiako attract ECE funding for their respective kōhanga reo at a per-child rate that falls short of the rate attracted by teachers with mainstream diplomas or degrees in early childhood education. Nevertheless, committed to the cause of the kōhanga reo movement, it is not uncommon for kaiako to consciously choose to work within a kōhanga reo rather than standard ECE environment. It was striking to have met with a number of kaiako who first entered the movement as parents and who, after sitting in on kōhanga reo sessions and realising the positive benefits for both their children and themselves, decided to enrol in training towards the kaiako role. I also met a number of kaiako who had grown up as kōhanga reo graduates and chose to give back to the movement as teachers. To me, this represents a true positive cycle, and proof, of success.

Many kōhanga reo roles and responsibilities are also carried out on a voluntary basis, and the kaiako, kaumātua, kaimahi and kaiāwhina that make up much of the kōhanga reo whānau often willingly wear many hats, taking up tasks ranging from assistant teaching to accounting, cleaning to cooking, or painting to plumbing, as necessary. Such collective commitment reinforces the whānau management pou of the kōhanga reo movement, and is based on a positive ‘can-do’ and ‘just-do-it’ attitude – one which recognises the work that is inherently worth doing, no matter the challenges, in the name of the children, the language and the kaupapa Māori.

At times, staff from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust or its regional office arms will coordinate targeted support visits to kōhanga reo that are struggling. The aim of such a visit might involve addressing sustainable upskilling and capacity-building for the kōhanga reo whānau concerned. More generally, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, sometimes through contractual arrangements with the Ministry of Education, regularly offers open professional development workshops for members of kōhanga reo whānau looking for ongoing or ‘refresher’ learning opportunities. These kinds of wānanga might focus on the history and current context of the kōhanga reo movement; on increasing te reo Māori competency; or on the pedagogies and curriculum frameworks used to teach te reo, for example. Furthermore, even if only informally, many kōhanga reo and purapura also take the initiative to organise their own in-house training meetings, and remain committed to continued cultural-linguistic learning under the guidance of local kaumātua.

Collective action and lifelong learning thereby form important bases of kōhanga reo staffing and professional development approaches. Ultimately, it is also just as imperative to be culturally ‘qualified’ as it is to obtain the employee qualifications expected by the Ministry.

CURRICULUM

The Ministry of Education endorses two simultaneous curriculum documents for use within the national ECE sector: Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early Childhood curriculum for mainstream, English-medium ECE environments, and Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo for kōhanga reo environments specifically. While each draw on the Māori metaphor of a woven mat (whāriki), and are currently presented within the same two-sided flipbook, proponents of the kōhanga reo movement very much assert that these are two distinct curriculum documents, not perfectly parallel translations of each other. Indeed, based on consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders such as Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, the Ministry of Education released a revised publication of the Te Whāriki curricula just this year, precisely because the previous write-up was argued to have been based on a messy enmeshment of Māori ECE-related worldviews. That is, it was said to have involved misunderstood and misrepresentative chopping and changing of the Māori concepts intended to underpin it, meaning that each of the essential curriculum elements were somewhat ineffectually ‘woven together.’
It is important to point out that kaikō and wider kōhanga reo whānau members have been drawing on the foundational principles and practices of Te Whāriki – on their own terms – since the kōhanga reo movement’s early beginnings, even before formalised curriculum frameworks were required. Te Whāriki is about meaningfully weaving together the at once physical (tinana), intellectual (hinengaro), emotional (whatumanawa) and spiritual (wairua) elements of a child’s being with the power or mana of the land (mana whenua), the people (mana tangata), the language (mana reo), the esoteric world (mana atua) and the exploration of one’s wider environment (mana aotūroa). It thereby represents a really holistic framework for child development, beyond a strictly educational or language revitalisation model alone. Indeed, one of the kaikō I had the opportunity to meet with expressed that it is difficult to adequately think about, or explain, Te Whāriki in words or as a written document as, ultimately, the idea is for one to embody it in their very being and ways of whānau relating.

Following the release of the updated curriculum documents, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust has prepared to develop professional development kits and run workshops around its kōhanga reo-specific interpretation and implementation. The Trust has also been seeking out a select group of Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo specialists to work with kōhanga reo whānau across the country to support them to feel confident in their understandings of, and approaches to acting on, Te Whāriki.

While each kōhanga reo is to adhere to the same Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo curriculum framework, there is flexibility around the individual learning experiences chosen to be carried out under the framework in any given kōhanga reo environment. Each kōhanga reo is encouraged to consider the inclusion of curriculum activities that reflect its own uniqueness, drawing on concepts and content that are particularly relevant to its local iwi, hapū and whānau. Some kaikō also turn to unique environmental patterns in inspiring their curriculum approach, structuring activities around specific seasons and the atua that influence corresponding environmental phenomena, for example. Personalising and localising the curriculum in these ways can provide an important sense of ownership and pride for each kōhanga reo whānau, and helps to ensure the relevance and responsiveness of children’s learning experiences.

Language therefore represents just one, albeit critical, component of a very comprehensive and cohesive kōhanga reo curriculum framework. Te Whāriki is designed to not only engage children in effective early learning, but to prepare them to be self-assured and successful Māori citizens as they enter all stages of life. Should a child’s educational-developmental experience be supportively framed by, and follow, Te Whāriki, the idea is that the child can then continue to ascend the poutama of intellectual achievement and enlightenment.

TEACHING/LEARNING RESOURCES

When the kōhanga reo movement was in its infancy, and even to this day, many of the teaching/learning resources used to support te reo Māori immersion in alignment with Te Korowai and Te Whāriki principles have been self-made by kōhanga reo whānau. Making simple in-house resources has resulted not only from a limited supply of professionally published resources (particularly in the past), but also from individual whānau decisions around resource affordability or relevance for their unique kōhanga reo context.

There is a sense that, rather than uncritically providing children with excessively elaborate resources, the focus should be given to the quality of messaging or learning experience able to be stimulated through a resource. Many kōhanga reo will successfully use language-neutral resources (such as simple craft materials, for instance) to nevertheless facilitate language rich activities. To give an example, one kōhanga reo I visited had recently engaged children in making basic mobiles of the Matariki star cluster tied to Māori New Year celebrations. This activity provided a platform for children to explore, and talk
about, events of significance from a Māori perspective, as well as uniquely Māori astronomical understandings. A number of kaiako emphasised the effectiveness of linguistic-cultural learning that incorporates kinaesthetic experiences and tangible outcomes for children in such a way. Remembering the efficacy and efficiency of people as resources is also important. That is, although simple, everyday verbal and wider inter-personal exchanges can nevertheless meaningfully support children’s learning around Māori ways of speaking, being and relating.

Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust has produced some key teaching/learning resources to share with kōhanga reo whānau as well. For example, just this year it distributed Te Oro Kōhanga: He kohinga waiata nā Te Kōhanga Reo, digitised and modernised versions of some of the very early, foundational waiata used within the kōhanga reo movement. As part of its Te Pātaka Rauemi initiative, the Trust is also working on the development and extension of an online resource database where members of kōhanga reo whānau will be able to download materials such as basic audio files of relevance, and template worksheets. The plan is for individual kōhanga reo staff to also be able to upload resources that they have personally produced but wish to share with others. In dealing with matters of copyright and cultural-intellectual property, it is possible that these pages will be protected by password-coded access, with passwords only to be provided to those working within, or otherwise clearly attached to, a recognised kōhanga reo.

Nowadays, mainstream ECE resource companies such as Learning Media Limited also have a catalogue of bilingual or te reo Māori-specific publications/products. Generally speaking, te reo Māori resources tend to be more expensive than standard English resources of a similar kind, given that they are still considered as belonging to more of a ‘niche’ market. Over the years, it has been important to articulate to resource companies the importance of recognising and respecting nuanced cultural perspectives in the resource production process. One example given to me was that segmented human body parts puzzles, which often involve a jigsaw severing of the head, would be considered inappropriate for use in kōhanga reo environments, based on the fact that the head is seen as the most sacred part of human anatomy within Māori culture.

Furthermore, alongside more recent innovations such as publicly available te reo Māori apps, archival resources such as radio recordings or digitised newspapers from distinct regions of Aotearoa can be valuable teaching/learning resources, particularly for kōhanga reo whānau with an interest in te reo Māori dialectical variation. I was made aware by many kaiako that, regardless of a resource’s production date, it is important to use the resource in a way that is relevant and engaging for a contemporary child audience, all the while remembering to draw links between the past, present and future in teaching/learning activities.

**ENROLMENT/ATTENDANCE**

Given the focus on full te reo Māori immersion, most kōhanga reo hours of operation generally span several hours a day for at least five days a week. These hours are set by individual kōhanga reo whānau, members of which will also decide on whether their particular kōhanga reo will remain open outside of school term dates or during holiday periods. Again, aligned to the uncompromisable pou of total immersion, child attendance in kōhanga reo is correspondingly expected to be based on full-time enrolment. As a condition of enrolment, some kōhanga reo also set up agreements with parents for the child to be subsequently enrolled in an adjunct (or any) kura kaupa Māori after graduating from the kōhanga reo. As children get closer to primary school age, their kōhanga reo may facilitate opportunities for them to spend certain hours or half-days at a local kura to support the preschool-school transition process.
Kōhanga reo enrolment is typically open to any child, regardless of his or her iwi, hapū or immediate whānau heritage. While some parents choose to send their children to a kōhanga reo that is attached to a particular iwi group (and the particular linguistic-cultural lens of that group), they are certainly not formally mandated or obligated to do so. Indeed, while Māori children aged zero to five years represent the target attendee demographic, even pākehā children in the same age bracket are welcomed into kōhanga reo environments.

It is important to appreciate that, in enrolling children in kōhanga reo, parents are effectively pledging their own commitment to the movement, expected to similarly uphold the Māori kaupapa and tikanga underpinning kōhanga reo practice, and to take on relevant responsibilities within the whānau management structure/system. Such cohesive commitment helps to maintain the integrity of the kōhanga reo movement, and supports its intergenerational learning outlook and outcomes.

Fees for child participation in kōhanga reo are negotiated and set by respective kōhanga reo whānau.24 As a general observation, kōhanga reo fees tend to be quite competitive when it comes to affordability, and when it comes to comparative enrolment costs within mainstream ECE institutions. It is also not uncommon for kōhanga reo to make exceptions, or further negotiate feasible fee payment schedules, for parents/families experiencing clear socio-economic disadvantage. Accessibility is considered paramount, at once physically, culturally and financially. Furthermore, one streamlined strategy for coordinating fee payment can involve organising for any childcare subsidy that parents are entitled to through the Ministry of Social Development’s Work and Income body to be paid directly to the kōhanga reo – this can reduce parents’ overall out-of-pocket owings to their kōhanga reo, as well as minimise administrative workloads.

Kaiako keep daily attendance sheets and send the details of these rolls through to Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust via an online/electronic system. As licenced kōhanga reo are eligible for per-child funding subsidies through the Ministry of Education, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust communicates the enrolment figures for each kōhanga reo to the Ministry on their behalf, and directs the Ministry-dispersed funds back through to the kōhanga reo accordingly. As indicated earlier, and mainly relating to how kōhanga reo-specific staffing qualifications have been regarded, the per-child subsidies for kōhanga reo are not entirely equally or equitably on par with the subsidies allocated to mainstream ECE services. Funding subsidies are paid on a quarterly and retrospective basis, which can be a bit of a further challenge for kōhanga reo which are just starting out with a limited amount of capital. While minimum enrolment numbers required for a kōhanga reo to be formally established stands at six children, I have been advised that, realistically, enrolment figures closer to around fifteen children would be recommended in order for a kōhanga reo to be financially viable and sustainable.

To summarise, while enrolment/attendance figures can influence the funding situation for kōhanga reo in notable ways, fostering opportunities for all children and families to be able to enter into kōhanga reo environments regardless of their financial situation is an important priority. In turn, children can be seen to give back to the kōhanga reo movement as language learners and leaders of the future, while their parents simultaneously contribute through their part within the whānau management system.

PARENT/FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

As outlined earlier, the whānau management model and intergenerational, lifelong learning approach of the kōhanga reo movement sees children’s parents, family, Elders and wider community members actively take on an array of roles – whether remunerated or voluntary – to support the philosophical ethos and practical operation of kōhanga reo environments. As well as committing to regularly

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24 In the beginnings of the kōhanga reo movement, before clear funding and fee-paying avenues were accessible, attendance was often cost-free, or simply supported through donations (koha).
scheduled whānau/purapura meetings, workshops and events, parents and other interested parties are commonly welcome to sit in on kōhanga reo sessions on an informal, ‘drop-in’ basis. Adults who continue to learn alongside their children play an important part in ensuring that the language immersion which children are exposed to in kōhanga reo can be mirrored in the home to the best extent possible.

One challenge regarding parent/family involvement has been explained as a notorious ‘five-year cycle’ – a situation that arises when, following a core group of children’s graduation from their kōhanga reo at around five years of age, there is an influx of new child enrolments and often an influx of new parents and families accordingly. Sometimes, this puts a fair amount of pressure on kaiako to more intensively educate, and manage expectations around, newly committed whānau members.

Outside of more immediate family and community participation, there are also a number of noteworthy ways in which te reo Māori is acknowledged, activated and celebrated in the broader public sphere. For example, as well as everyday acts of acknowledgement such as the erection of bilingual signage in mainstream community areas, designated national events such as Māori Language Week celebrations present meaningful avenues for all people across Aotearoa to involve themselves in recognising the importance of te reo Māori revitalisation and the kōhanga reo movement’s role within it. My own experience in Aotearoa seemed to suggest that there is a solid public awareness of the kōhanga reo movement, with unaffiliated taxi drivers, hotel staff and flight attendants nevertheless confirming their knowledge of the movement upon my conversational mention of it.

One of the kaiako I met with described how the general community tends to be very respectful and responsive when she takes children out on excursions. She mentioned that, even if their own te reo Māori knowledge is limited, community members that they pass by on the streets, or sit next to in buses, will often keenly make the effort to greet children through a simple “kia ora” (”hello”) or “mōrena” (“good morning”), to give a brief example. As well as helping to maintain the total immersion experience, such efforts also allow children to feel reassured by witnessing the learning that they experience in kōhanga reo positively reinforced in their wider life-world.

Overall, the collective involvement of parents, families, Elders and wider community members is key not only within kōhanga reo, but also when it comes to supporting kōhanga reo learning experiences to be meaningfully extended in outside environments. Spending quality time with others interested in (or at least open to) language revitalisation, rather than spending energy on trying to convince the ‘naysayers,’ can be an important way of keeping the momentum and morale up for the kōhanga reo movement.

**COSTS/FUNDING**

Even if kōhanga reo sit within the lowest funded ECE stream, the finance-related support provided by Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust is significant to consider. Itself sustained through public funds and other contractual or philanthropic sources, Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust works to coordinate the following kinds of monetary matters for kōhanga reo across the country:

- The administration and disbursement of Ministry of Education per-child funding subsidies.
- The acquisition and administration of property – most kōhanga reo buildings/sites are owned by the Trust, leaving individual kōhanga reo whānau to be concerned only with the financing of elements such as electricity-type bills and chosen furnishings or renovations.
- The send-out of certain training or teaching materials.
- The distribution of ‘whānau cards’ – debit-type cards sponsored by a number of relevant businesses, giving kōhanga reo whānau a designated discount/rebate when purchasing kōhanga reo-related goods or services from those businesses.
• The provision of loans to kōhanga reo requiring assistance with the purchase of relevant assets such as pick-up/drop-off vehicles.
• The administration of private health insurance for each child enrolled in a kōhanga reo – this allows health issues that may affect language and wider learning to be detected, and dealt with, early on. To support kōhanga reo in more remote locations in particular, the Trust also has a partnership with a doctor who facilitates online medical consultations and prescriptions.
• The review of individual kōhanga reo financial audits, if they are more complex or questionable in any way.
• The awarding of scholarships to support immersion school graduates to enter into tertiary education degree programs.

On the ground, many of the remaining financial matters (such as resource purchases, enrolment fees and staff salaries/wages) are negotiated and agreed upon by respective kōhanga reo whānau. Members of the kōhanga reo whānau correspondingly assume roles as treasures, secretaries and office administrators to manage these more everyday economic elements. Fundraising events and initiatives are also carried out by kōhanga reo whānau, serving to provide further financial support and sustainability.

On the whole, the nature of kōhanga reo funding has evolved fairly significantly since the movement’s earliest years, when kōhanga reo had to operate on a purely voluntary basis, or could rely only on sources of smaller grants such as the Department of Māori Affairs and Māori Education Foundation. Nevertheless, volunteerism is still a core part of many kōhanga reo whānau contributions, and there continues to be a shared sentiment that money matters should not affect the real motivations behind the movement. Indeed, as a local saying goes, te reo Māori revitalisation efforts are motivated mainly by aroha, koha and hoha – love, voluntary contributions, and the fire that comes with the frustration of knowing that no one will lead the change if whānau won’t take the lead themselves.

**ASSESSMENT**

Although chartered to Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, kōhanga reo are licenced by the Ministry of Education according to their compliance with the regulatory criteria outlined in the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008, which does include distinct criteria for playgroup, home-based, centre-based, hospital-based or kōhanga reo services respectively. Licencing is required for a service to be eligible for government funding through the Ministry of Education.

Additionally, while Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust, often through its regional offices, has its own accepted processes for overseeing and responding to the assessment of individual kaiako and kōhanga reo, each kōhanga reo also undergoes periodic external quality assessments through the Education Review Office (ERO). The frequency of ERO reviews for a kōhanga reo to undergo is dependent on the assessment rating determined at the previous review – if a kōhanga reo performs particularly well in a review, it may not have to undergo a further review for up to another four years, for example. On the flip slide, the gap between review periods would be shorter for a kōhanga reo that received a lower performance rating at the time of its last review. ERO has a designated Māori Review Services team, Te Uepū ā-Motu, which releases its reports in both te reo Māori and English. It has worked with Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust to develop a particular review Framework for Kōhanga Reo and set of Evaluation Indicators for Kōhanga Reo to better respect and reflect the unique philosophies of kōhanga reo environments. Accordingly, many of the evaluation indicators are aligned to the five mana of the Te Whāriki a te Kōhanga Reo curriculum framework, which kaiako similarly draw on in monitoring children’s holistic developmental progress. Kaiako commonly keep their own personal diaries, as well as maintain portfolios for each child that showcase work samples and learning stories around the different
mana. As well as being meaningful pieces of documentation to track and communicate children’s progress internally, these kinds of documentation are also consulted as part of ERO review processes. While maintaining external review expectations becomes important, some kōhanga reo staff assert that often it is informal, anecdotal evidence on the ground that most reassures them that their work is of value. To give just one example, one staff member expressed how one of his own measures of success was in seeing that, despite the disproportionate incarceration rates for Māori people, only two of his former kōhanga reo students (out of more than one thousand students and over more than twenty years) had gone to jail for minor offences. An attention to both qualitative as much as quantitative, informal as much as formal, and internal as much as external measures of success is therefore important to maintain.

**POST-PRESCHOOL LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

Given the kōhanga reo focus on intergenerational, lifelong learning, and in order to maximise opportunities for sustained progression of linguistic skill development, access to post-preschool language learning opportunities for kōhanga reo graduates are of immense value.

Aligned to the kōhanga reo movement, the emergence of kura kaupapa Māori for primary school-aged students and wharekura for secondary school-aged students has meant that, across Aotearoa, thousands of students are able continue and complete their entire pre-tertiary education through te reo Māori immersion. Even a number of non-Māori medium schools readily offer te reo Māori as a separate subject for several hours a week.

In the tertiary education context, and outside of kōhanga reo-specific training courses such as Whakapakari, students can access a number of diplomas and degrees in te reo Māori at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. Adults are also able to sign up to various other sources of te reo Māori education, such as self-paced online learning modules, whether informally designed for personal interest, or provided through accredited training institutions. To an extent, simply participating in public life in Aotearoa can offer up further – even if inexplicit or indirect – opportunities to engage in te reo Māori language learning, such as in the case of tuning into relevant programs on Māori Television, or paying active attention to bilingual signage.

Arguably the most remarkable example of ensuring successive language learning opportunities beyond the preschool context is the Te Wānanga Whare Tapere o Takitimu complex described in the ‘Programme Highlights’ section above. In providing immersion-based education across all age groups through early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary and community programs alike, the complex sets an inspirational standard in fostering not only strong linguistic-cultural foundations, but also strong futures, for kōhanga reo graduates and their wider whānau.

**RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING/RESOURCES**


Learnings from Leg #2: USA

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Meeting with representatives from ‘Aha Pūnana Leo

‘Aha Pūnana Leo Inc. is a private, not-for-profit organisation that oversees all thirteen Language Nests (pūnana leo) across the Hawaiian Islands. It was formed in 1983, when a group of seven Hawaiian language teachers met to discuss the critical state of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and committed to developing an organisation, at the grassroots, that strives to inspire change through ensuring that the language will remain a living one for future generations. During a scheduled meeting with life-long language advocate, Nāmaka Rawlins (former Executive Director and Current Director of Strategic Partnerships for ‘Aha Pūnana Leo), I also had the per chance opportunity to meet with two of the founding members of ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, Kauanoe Kamanā and Dr William H. “Pila” Wilson. Kauanoe and Pila continue to serve on the ‘Aha Pūnana Leo Board of Directors, with Kauanoe currently in President capacity. Also present at the meeting was Board Member Hulilau Wilson, a pūnana leo graduate and member of the Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u school’s graduating class of 1999 – the first class to have completed the entirety of their education through Hawaiian immersion in more than one hundred years. It certainly meant a lot to be able to meet, learn and share with this incredible group of people, and be moved by their wealth of Language Nest experience and enthusiasm.

Visiting Pūnana Leo o Hilo

Guided by Nāmaka Rawlins, and following some beautiful welcoming songs and chants from the children, I was fortunate to be able to observe children’s impressive learning in action at Pūnana Leo o Hilo. It was also very worthwhile getting to know the interaction between the physical environment and the simultaneously educational and socio-emotional environment at this pūnana leo, and to speak with Nāmaka and staff about the wider work involved in establishing and extending an effective pūnana leo preschool. Furthermore, I was able to get a glimpse into the Hi‘ipēpē Infant Program attached to Pūnana Leo o Hilo, as well as the adjoining Nāwahīokalani‘ōpu‘u immersion school.

Meeting with the team at Hale Kuamo‘o

Established in response to Hawai‘i State Legislature in 1989, Hale Kuamo‘o serves as the Hawaiian Language Centre within the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo’s Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikolani College of Hawaiian Language. In meeting with members of the Hale Kuamo‘o team – Kaulana Dameg, Robert Kai (“Kekai”) Irwin and Māhealani Kobashigawa – I was thrilled to be able to learn about, and browse through, the Hawaiian language resources produced by Hale Kuamo‘o to support (pre)school curricula, as well as to support wider education and engagement with ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in personal, public and professional life. Together, the Hale Kuamo‘o team and I shared experiences regarding both the challenges and opportunities tied to First Languages resource production, exchanging some really meaningful insights and ideas.

Note that the USA leg of my Churchill Fellowship journey was based solely in the State of Hawai‘i, where US Language Nest efforts have been most concentrated. Accordingly, pūnana leo in Hawai‘i are focused on in this Report as a particular case study.
Meeting with Dr Eve Okura

While normally based at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa on the Island of O‘ahu, Eve had a scheduled visit to the Big Island of Hawai‘i which coincided with my own visit there, giving us the great chance to enjoy an in-person meeting. Eve had actually made electronic contact with me earlier this year, enquiring about the Miriwoong Language Nest program soon before submitting her doctoral thesis, *Language Nests and Language Acquisition: An Empirical Analysis*. Her thesis includes USA case studies outside of the State of Hawai‘i (such as Mohawk, Lakota, Ojibwe and Alutiiq Language Nest examples), as well as studies from countries outside of the scope of my Churchill Fellowship travels (such as an Inari Sami Language Nest in Finland). I would really encourage readers of this Report to also engage with Eve’s thesis, as our respective research contexts and case studies can combine to shape a more comprehensive picture of Language Nests across the globe. Note that Eve’s dissertation was due before we were able to coordinate a conversation about the Miriwoong Language Nest initiative. Her thesis does make a brief examination of the five government-piloted Language and Culture Nests in New South Wales, although these are quite distinct from the Miriwoong Language Nest program in Western Australia, described more so as “administrative bodies” or “service delivery coordination centres,” rather than community-run and immersion-based preschool programs.26

In exchanging experiences with Eve, it was a pleasure to consider meaningful opportunities for future conversation and collaboration. I also enjoyed discussing our shared recognition of the ‘extra-linguistic’ (e.g. cultural, socio-emotional and broad educational) benefits of language revitalisation, beyond First Language fluency development alone.

Learning about the Hawai‘i Department of Education’s Hawaiian Studies and Hawaiian Language Immersion Programs

As part of my exploration into continuing linguistic-cultural learning opportunities for children after they graduate from a pūnana leo preschool, I was able to share a conversation with Education Specialist Manuwai Peters to learn a little more about the Hawai‘i Department of Education’s Hawaiian Studies and Hawaiian Language Immersion Programs. I really appreciated the opportunity to also listen to a perspective from the governmental departmental level, and to hear about how these two programs have evolved over time in response to both legislative and community imperatives.

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PŪNANA LEO: SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNINGS

LANGUAGE GUIDE

As with the te reo Māori ‘Language Guide’ section above, the translations contained in this section do not necessarily represent direct or exact English equivalents of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i terms. Rather, consider this list to be but a basic outline of some of the common ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i terms of use when it comes to talking about pūnana leo.

- Akua – god; supernatural or divine being
- Aloha – love; affection (also a common Hawaiian greeting)
- Hālāwai – meeting
- Hana – work; job; duty; service (whether paid or unpaid)
- Ho‘iho‘i – to return; give back
- Honua – earth; land; world
- Honuanua – within pūnana leo, smaller learning stations into which a classroom is often divided, each dedicated to a specific subject area
- Hui kīpaeapae – drawing on ‘stepping stone’ imagery, this is the name given to regular linguistic-cultural classes run together with pūnana leo parents/families, often on a weekly basis
- Kahu – site coordinator/director
- Kapu – sacred; consecrated; taboo
- Keiki – child
- Kōmike – committee
- Kula Kaiapuni Hawai‘i – Hawaiian medium/immersion school
- Kuleana – responsibility
- Kumu – teacher
- Kūpuna – grandparents; Elders; ancestors
- Lā – day; date
- Makua – parent
- Mauli – life force
- Na‘auao – learning; knowledge; wisdom
- ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i – Hawaiian language
- ‘Ōlelo no‘eau – proverb
- ‘Ohana – family
- Pūnana leo – language nest

BRIEF BACKGROUND

There is a close relationship between the Māori kōhanga reo and Hawaiian pūnana leo case. Both te reo Māori and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i belong to the same (Austronesian) language family; English has acted as the colonising language across the islands of Aotearoa and Hawai‘i alike; and the first pūnana leo opened just two years after the first kōhanga reo was officially opened in the early 1980s. Indeed, it was in being directly inspired by the kōhanga reo movement in Aotearoa that a small group of seven Hawaiian language teachers met to discuss the dire situation of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i decline, and established ‘Aha Pūnana Leo in a dedicated attempt to reverse this decline. Following almost one hundred years of ‘ōlelo

27 Note also that, while I have listed most of the rough translations in their singular form, most nouns in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i maintain the same spelling in their plural forms.
Hawai‘i being outlawed as a medium of instruction in (pre)school settings\textsuperscript{28}, the early years of pūnana leo operation in Hawai‘i effectively required parents seeking immersion education opportunities for their children to boycott the public schooling system and navigate an unaccommodating legal environment. However, today, there are thirteen legally recognised and widely respected pūnana leo sites across five different Hawaiian islands, continuing to contribute to the revitalisation of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in a really momentous manner.

**POLITICO-LEGAL CONTEXT**

A number of my overseas hosts suggested that the early emergence of pūnana leo in Hawai‘i was in many ways propelled by a wider cultural renaissance and resurgence period beginning around a decade prior. While this period provided some critical momentum behind the beginnings of pūnana leo preschools, other politico-legal infrastructure or incidents which have impacted on the trajectory of pūnana leo learning environments – both well before, and after, the first pūnana leo opened in 1984 – include:

- **The introduction of a legal ban on ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as a medium of instruction in all public and private school education (1896)**

  In 1896, under Act 57, Section 30 of the Laws of the Republic of Hawai‘i, it was officially stated that “The English Language shall be the medium and basis of instruction in all public and private schools... Any schools that shall not conform to the provisions of this section shall not be recognized by the Department.”\textsuperscript{29} Teachers and students subsequently suffered harsh prejudice and punishment for speaking ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i in (pre)school settings, resulting in a significant demise in the number and proficiency of speakers in the decades to come.\textsuperscript{30}

- **The teaching of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as a ‘foreign language’-type course in schools mandated by Hawai‘i Territorial Legislature (1919)**

  Although described as relatively ‘tokenistic’ or inadequately enforced, laws passed within Hawai‘i Territorial Legislature in 1919 set a requirement for schools to teach ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, not as part of a mainstream teaching medium, but as a separate ‘foreign language’-type course.

- **The admission of Hawai‘i as a US state, and the subsequent state establishment of the Committee for the Preservation of Hawaiian Language, Art, and Culture (1959)**

  Based at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the Committee for the Preservation of Hawaiian Language, Art, and Culture was established by the newly admitted US state of Hawai‘i to protect and promote knowledge of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i through the production of teaching materials and wider resources.

- **The hosting of the Hawai‘i State Constitutional Convention and granting of official status to ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i (1978)**

  Following the passing of two provisions submitted at the 1978 Hawai‘i State Constitutional Convention, the study of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i was accorded special promotion by the state, and the language itself was accorded official status. Hawai‘i thereby represents the first – and only – US state to have more than one (English) official language.

\textsuperscript{28} This ban extended even to Kamehameha Schools, part of a private schooling system designed specifically for students of Hawaiian descent.


\textsuperscript{30} The introduction of this legal ban is in many ways ironic, given that, despite ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i having been an unwritten language prior to colonial contact, Hawai‘i has been identified as having had perhaps the highest literacy rates in the world by the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, with flourishing circulations of Hawaiian newspapers and wider print media.
• The passing of a bill permitting ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i instruction in public schools, and the lifting of legal barriers to pūnana leo operations, within Hawai‘i State Legislature (1986)

Following two unsuccessful attempts at passing a bill to give pūnana leo the same legal status as private foreign language schools in 1984 and 1985\(^3\), and two unsuccessful attempts at passing a bill to re-establish ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as a legally recognised medium of public educational instruction in 1983 and 1984, a several-hours-long hearing in 1986 led to the passing of bills within Hawai‘i State Legislature which lifted the legal barriers to pūnana leo operations, and legally sanctioned the use of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as a language of instruction in public schools.

• The passing of three key resolutions, and of the Native Hawaiian Education Act (1987-1988)

In 1987, the Hawai‘i State Legislature passed a resolution calling for the state Department of Education to provide for schools taught through ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i instruction/immersion, as well as a resolution calling for the US Congress to shape legislative policy in active support of the revitalisation of all Native American languages. The following year, the Native American Languages Issues Institute correspondingly passed a resolution requesting legal recognition, rights and revitalisation support for native languages, including ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. Furthermore, aligned to these resolutions, it was in 1988 that the Native Hawaiian Education Act came into effect. Appreciating the distinct educational priorities of Native Hawaiian people and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers, the Act was introduced to push federal government policy to better acknowledge and act on these priorities through meaningfully engaging and empowering Native Hawaiian organisations.

• The signing of the Native American Languages Act (1990)

Modelled on the 1987 resolution pertaining to Native American languages, the Native American Languages Act was officially signed by the US President in 1990. Section 104, in particular, includes a number of statements of significance to pūnana leo, such as its call for US policy to:

- “preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages”\(^3^2\);
- “allow exceptions to teacher certification requirements for Federal programs, and programs funded in whole or in part by the Federal Government, for instruction in Native American languages when such teacher certification requirements hinder the employment of qualified teachers who teach in Native American languages”;\(^3^3\)
- “encourage and support the use of Native American languages as a medium of instruction in order to encourage and support... Native American language survival,... educational opportunity,... increased student success and performance,... increased student awareness and knowledge of their culture and history, and... increased student and community pride”\(^3^4\).

• The designation of the month of February as ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Month within Hawai‘i Revised Statutes (2012)

To celebrate and encourage the use of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, a new Section was added to Hawai‘i Revised Statutes in 2012, officially designating the month of February as ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Month. This Section

\(^3^1\) Even when it first appeared the bill was successful in 1985, changes made in the Joint Committee included a clause which excluded children under the age of five, and thereby excluded pūnana leo.
GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES/SUPPORT

Since its establishment in 1983, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo Inc. has served as the lead governing body for pūnana leo preschools across the Hawaiian Islands. ‘Aha Pūnana Leo is itself governed by a Board of eight voluntary members, all of whom are ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speakers, and have a demonstrated commitment to ensuring that the language will be spoken for generations to come. Indeed, some of the Board Members I had the privilege of meeting were also among the organisation’s founding membership group, with another having been among the first cohort of students in more than one hundred years to have completed their entire (pre)school education through ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion.

‘Aha Pūnana Leo management is driven by a mission to inspire positive change and ensure that, in alignment with the organisation’s core vision, ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i remains a living language both in Hawai‘i and beyond. The organisation provides administrative and advisory support to pūnana leo staff and families on the ground, as well as managing strategic partnerships and external stakeholder relationships. One particularly important partnership is that between ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and Ka Haka ‘Ula Ke‘elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, a public-private consortium which has helped to successfully streamline access to appropriate ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i resources and education programs from preschool right through to postgraduate level. Other communicative, consultative and/or collaborative relationships include engagement with institutions such as the Native Hawaiian Education Council, the National Coalition of Native American Language Schools and Programs, and the state Department of Education, to give just a few examples.

It is important to note that, largely because pūnana leo preschools were effectively afforded the same legal status and rights as private foreign language schools in 1986, they are not directly accountable to the state Department of Education and are provided the liberty of operating independently of a mainstream, English-medium early childhood education system. In fact, both the official status of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and the recognised legal status of pūnana leo preschools means that, in many ways, pūnana leo could be seen as ‘normalised’ and ‘mainstream’ in their own right. ‘Aha Pūnana Leo does nevertheless maintain a relationship with the state Department of Education and its relevant sub-councils (such as ‘Aha Kauleo, the state-wide Hawaiian Immersion Advisory Council), not only to exchange important insights, experiences and ideas, but also in the co-administration of a handful of K-12 Hawaiian medium/immersion public schools. Some immersion schools such as Nāwahiokalani‘ōpu‘u have laboratory status, and are cooperated by ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, the Department of Education and university partners.35

Above all, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo and individual pūnana leo staff are perhaps most accountable to parents and families, and expect parents and families to show their accountability and commitment in turn. Because pūnana leo are, at their core, ‘ohana or family-based educational environments, parents and family members become meaningfully involved in management processes and everyday operations by committing to their own regular ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i learning; attending monthly hālāwai makua (parents’ meetings); and providing at least a nominal amount of in-kind service to their pūnana leo. Engaging parents and families in such a manner helps to ensure that, at the grassroots, all those involved in pūnana leo are committed to shared language revitalisation goals, and are able to adopt a shared sense of ownership over those goals and their outcomes.

35 In the case of Nāwahiokalani‘ōpu‘u, the partnership includes the Ka Haka ‘Ula O Keʻelikōlani College of Hawaiian Language at the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, for example.
PHILOSOPHIES, PROTOCOLS AND PEDAGOGIES

Pūnana leo preschools meaningfully prescribe to Kumu Honua Mauli Ola, a native Hawaiian philosophy statement put together by ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i-speaking educators and used not only to inform educational programming, develop culturally responsive curricula and prepare new kumu, but also as a framework for positively shaping institutional operations and family life more broadly.36 This philosophy statement recognises that an individual’s essential mauli or life force is comprised of, and cultivated by, the holistic interaction of four key elements: the language element (Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ōlelo); the physical behaviour element (Ka ‘Ao‘ao Lawena); the spiritual element (Ka ‘Ao‘ao Pili ‘Uhane); and traditional knowledge element (Ka ‘Ao‘ao ‘Ike Ku‘una).37

In directly fostering the language and traditional knowledge elements, as well as supporting children’s physical and spiritual development alike (even if more subtly or indirectly), pūnana leo environments and learning experiences are also shaped around a range of traditional proverbs or ‘ōlelo no‘eau. To give just one example, ‘ōlelo no‘eau such as “‘a‘ohe hana nui ke alu ‘ia (“no task is too big when done together by all”) can serve as important reminders of the power of collective learning and collaborative energy in progressing language revitalisation processes.

A positive example of collective learning in practice within pūnana leo is regular ‘big circle time’ – time during which keiki gather together with their kumu in a circle formation to share in a number of educational experiences. Circle-based learning typically takes place about three times a day, between indoor and outdoor play times, meal times and rest times. During my visit to Pūnana Leo o Hilo, I was able to observe a big circle session wherein the young 3 and 4 year-old learners actively introduced themselves and greeted each other; gave thanks and praise; sang songs; completed a weather and lunar cycle chart; did some physical stretches; and repeated words and phrases from a storybook, all in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.

The fundamental kapu of total ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion means that communicating exclusively in the Hawaiian language is celebrated as a somewhat sacred or consecrated protocol, while speaking English is considered a kind of taboo in the pūnana leo context. Immediately displayed at the front door of Pūnana Leo o Hilo is a clear ‘Greeting Protocols’ poster, highlighting appropriate ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i greeting phrases for makua, keiki and kumu to exchange before keiki can respectfully enter the room. It is not only within individual pūnana leo that total immersion is expected; executive staff and wider employees at ‘Aha Pūnana Leo also endeavour to enact this protocol with integrity, putting their energy into carrying out meetings and everyday business in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i.

One key pedagogical strategy in promoting children’s ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i skill development has been introducing them to the Hakalama from a very young age. The Hakalama represents the consistent ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i syllabary, and chanting some or all of its ninety phonetic units is commonly repeated during big circle time, for example. Incorporating songs, gestures and hand-eye association activities into Hakalama recitation supports children to quickly learn the ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i sounds which form the basis of wider words and phrases. More generally, the provision of rich and repeated opportunities for children to simultaneously engage in multimodal (audio, oral, physical, written and visual) language expression has enabled many pūnana leo participants to develop solid ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i communication skills within just a few short months.

In all, the kinds of abovementioned philosophies, protocols and pedagogies combine to address two shared and overarching pūnana leo goals:

1. To “create a supportive environment where students and their families develop the ability to communicate effectively in the Hawaiian language, understand and appreciate Hawaiian culture and values and participate confidently in contemporary Hawaiian society.”

2. To “execute a program that ensures kindergarten readiness in areas of age-appropriate social, intellectual, and perceptual motor skills.”

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

An attention to physical structures and spacing is of notable significance within pūnana leo preschools. For example, as described above, the routine use of ‘big circle’ seating formations helps to effectively organise everyday learning exercises, all the while symbolically reinforcing the value of unified, collective learning. Outside of big circle time, children are nevertheless also given the opportunity to independently explore distinct honuanua – smaller learning stations into which a classroom is often divided, each dedicated to a specific subject area. As well as ensuring designated places for children to concentrate on particular content, honuanua also spatially honour the ‘ōlelo no’eau and cultural values that are central to pūnana leo philosophies and curriculum frameworks. Honuanua can, for example, help children to better interpret, internalise and illustrate traditional proverbial statements of value such as “he wahi ko kēlā me kēia mea” (“everything has a proper place”).

Akin to the kōhanga reo case, spatial demarcation is also crucial to facilitating full native language immersion for pūnana leo participants. That is, should English conversation be required between kahu, kumu and visiting parties, it is generally only permitted in separate office spaces, backrooms, carparks or other allocated areas away from pūnana leo child participants. As well as distancing spoken English from pūnana leo environments, the removal of written English from pūnana leo signage and resources further provides for a full ‘ōlelo Hawai’i immersion experience.

It is important not only to consider indoor learning environments, but also how the outdoor environments within which pūnana leo are situated can play host to meaningful learning experiences. For example, Pūnana Leo o Hilo is surrounded by abundant vegetation, allowing for Hawaiian linguistic-cultural concepts pertaining to sustainable planning, harvesting and food preparation to be incorporated into curriculum activities.

Overall, the physical environment of pūnana leo could be described as intersecting with the social and educational environment in a way that is at once culturally sensitive and academically rigorous; secure yet stimulating; and homely yet lively.

**STAFFING, EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Formal staffing roles within pūnana leo range from kahu (site coordinator) to kumu alaka‘i (lead teacher); kāko‘o kumu (teacher aide); pani hakahaka (preschool substitute teacher); and kāko‘o ke‘ena (office clerk). Recruitment and remuneration for these positions is coordinated by ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, which also works to employ Elders to regularly interact with the children whenever feasible and appropriate.

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40 (or standing/lying, depending on the particular learning exercise in action)

Many of the *pūnana leo* employment positions are assumed by parents. Upon enrolling a child in *pūnana leo*, each parent will also commit to play a part in the *ho‘iho‘i honua* roster – a schedule of in-kind roles or chores (such as clean-up, cooking or fundraising activities) that parents contribute to as a means of ‘giving back’ to the *pūnana leo* community.

‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i proficiency is the main attribute sought in prospective *pūnana leo* employees. Because *pūnana leo* preschools operate independently of the state Department of Education, *pūnana leo* teaching staff do not strictly need to adhere to standard teacher/educator licencing requirements. This is not to say that staff are unskilled, or that there are not opportunities for ongoing upskilling. Outside of mainstream early childhood education training, examples of professional development avenues for *pūnana leo* staff include:

- ‘Learning by doing.’ There is a sense that, simply by working with the children each day, and through the running of *hui kipaepae* (linguistic-cultural classes involving parents/families) each week, *pūnana leo* staff are able to continue to build their comfort, confidence and competence in facilitating ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion.

- Each summer, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo coordinates a week-long intensive workshop for all *kumu* from all thirteen *pūnana leo* sites to attend together. Teachers from Hawaiian medium/immersion schools (particularly those working in the early transition years) are also invited to attend to learn more about *pūnana leo* principles, pedagogies and curriculum plans, for example. ‘Aha Pūnana Leo staff can of course also be contacted by individual *pūnana leo* staff for guidance throughout the year. In addition, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo offers a self-paced and self-directed online ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i course known as Niulolahiki Distance Learning. Niulolahiki Distance Learning is broken down into twenty-five chapters aligned to Nā Kai ‘Ewalu, a key text for ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i beginners, and one can subscribe to the course on a pay-as-you-go, chapter-by-chapter basis.

- As well as the possibility of undertaking a number of undergraduate and postgraduate certificate/degree programs in Hawaiian Language, Hawaiian Culture and wider Hawaiian Studies, it is also possible to access tertiary courses specifically dedicated to *pūnana leo* philosophies and pedagogies. To give just a couple of examples, the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo’s Ke‘elikolani College of Hawaiian Language offers a He ‘Ohana Lanakila course, centred on exploring the concept of ‘*ohana* at the macro and micro level and examining the place of *pūnana leo* in promoting ‘*ohana* -based education. It also delivers two Ma Ka Hana Ka ‘Ike courses, focusing on the curricula and pedagogical practices of *pūnana leo*. These courses are taught solely in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, reinforcing the significance of immersion-based education even well beyond the preschool level of learning.

**CURRICULUM**

Each year, a different ‘*ōlelo no‘eau* is selected as the framework or focus point for children’s *pūnana leo* education across the Hawaiian Islands. Workshopping around how to construct a clear curriculum scope and sequence around the selected ‘*ōlelo no‘eau*, and planning around how to correspondingly translate proverbial or poetical sayings into practical curriculum activities, is initiated at the week-long intensive training organised by ‘Aha Pūnana Leo each summer. Attention is also given to how prospective  

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42 At the post-preschool (primary and secondary) level, Hawaiian medium/immersion teachers will need to have passed the regular state teacher licencing requirements. Currently, there is no distinct qualification required to be licenced and employed as a Hawaiian-medium teacher, although the state Department of Education is currently scoping opportunities for offering further training in, and formal recognition of, Hawaiian language (and wider Hawaiian Studies) teaching skills. ‘Aha Pūnana Leo is also investigating possibilities around developing its own official certification for *pūnana leo* teaching staff.

43 Indeed, to maintain the rigour of *pūnana leo* programming, lead teachers are often expected to have completed a Bachelor level degree with a nominal amount of credits in Early Childhood Education, as well as college level Hawaiian language studies.
curriculum activities are able to effectively accommodate and enrich all four elements identified in the Kumu Honua Mauli Ola educational philosophy statement.

Because all pūnana leo subscribe to the same goals and philosophies, and because all kumu are invited to share in the annual intensive training week, there is a strong sense of consistency in curriculum design and implementation across the thirteen pūnana leo sites. Nevertheless, there is certainly flexibility for individual pūnana leo to adapt or develop aspects of the curriculum to best suit their particular local context and participant dynamic.

There is some incidental overlap between the pūnana leo curriculum and mainstream early childhood education curricula. That is, pūnana leo pre-schoolers still learn content such as basic colours, shapes and numbers, as would any pre-schooler, but do so exclusively in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i and through a distinctly Hawaiian lens. To give an example, learning about shapes such as circles or crescents can be meaningfully incorporated into learning about the lunar cycle which underpins the traditional Hawaiian calendar. Given that certain days of the lunar cycle are named after major akua, learning can correspondingly be extended to include conversations about Hawaiian gods and spirituality more generally.

To summarise, the pūnana leo curriculum is focused on holistically integrating the linguistic, physical, spiritual and traditional knowledge elements of children’s mauli, drawing on traditional Hawaiian educational concepts and content to simultaneously support children to fully function and succeed in contemporary life.

TEACHING/LEARNING RESOURCES

Established in response to Hawai‘i State Legislature in 1989, and servicing all Hawaiian islands with immersion (pre)schools on them, Hale Kuamo‘o – the Hawaiian Language Centre within the University of Hawai‘i at Hilo’s Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke‘elikolani College of Hawaiian Language – plays a pertinent role in the production of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i teaching/learning resources. In the early days of pūnana leo emergence and Hale Kuamo‘o’s establishment, resourcing efforts predominantly involved translating existing English texts into ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i – quite literally cutting out ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i translations and pasting them over written English, in many instances. Self-written and self-illustrated paper books, told directly from a Hawaiian perspective, then became more prominent. Today, Hale Kuamo‘o has an extensive catalogue of professionally published resources including storybooks, workbooks, posters, cards and games, all in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. Indeed, instead of publishing bilingual resources, Hale Kuamo‘o focuses on printing only in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, firstly in an attempt to further normalise the Hawaiian language and, secondly, so that readers will not simply revert to English translations.

While the physical establishment of the Hale Kuamo‘o centre was legislatively backed in 1989, the legislation hasn’t actually resulted in any ongoing operational funding for Hale Kuamo‘o. As such, the design and quantity of resources produced by Hale Kuamo‘o over the years has been somewhat dependent on the contractual details of diverse funding grants. Where possible, the Hale Kuamo‘o team will work to produce resources that are applicable or adaptable to audiences across wide age groups.

44 Sometimes with an English index/explainer at the back or in a separate booklet.
45 Recently, Hale Kuamo‘o was involved in the production of a suite of school readers and accompanying teacher handbooks centred on traditional Hawaiian science and ecological knowledges. This was an exciting project in that, even though the book sets were later translated into separate English versions for use in mainstream schools, the English versions came after the Hawaiian versions, helping to normalise and give pre-eminence to ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i. Indeed, some ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i terms remain in the English set in instances where they would have otherwise been inaccurately ‘lost in translation’ or inappropriately framed through an English lens.
46 Even though, for a while now, there has been a particular focus on early intervention and ‘P-3’ resourcing in the US, meaning that accessing funds to shape specific resources for the middle school context has been a noticeable challenge.
and will generally ensure that resource distribution costs are covered by grants so that all Hawaiian medium/immersion (pre) schools can freely access copies.

As well as catering for physical or financial access to resources, Hale Kuamo’o staff are committed to making sure that their resources are user-friendly and educationally accessible. Accordingly, when releasing a new resource, they will often host workshops about the context of the resource’s production, and about why, when, where and how one might best engage with the resource. Attendance at these workshops is open to all (teachers, students, families and wider community members alike), and attendees will typically receive a free copy of the resource concerned.

A number of the teaching/learning resources that have come out of the Hale Kuamo’o centre have been collaboratively produced with partners such as ‘Aha Pūnana Leo or Kamehameha Schools. Some have also been based on external yet well-accepted literacy planning/assessment tools such as The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum. Where Hale Kuamo’o staff are unsure of the most accurate or appropriate language use, or require the creation of a new ‘ōlelo Hawai’i term to describe a contemporary object or concept, they will also consult with the Hawaiian Lexicon Committee, established specifically for the purpose of progressing lexicon expansion in 1987. Common lexicon expansion strategies used by the Committee include applying ‘ōlelo Hawai’i phonetics to an English word; drawing on words from other Polynesian languages; or applying existing ‘ōlelo Hawai’i descriptors to label the new object or concept.

Archival resources such as digitised Hawaiian newspapers have also served as valuable documentary resources in supporting ‘ōlelo Hawai’i revitalisation. Inspired by the flourishing newspaper circulations of the mid-19th Century, Hale Kuamo’o, often through the support of student volunteers, has begun publishing a quarterly newspaper exclusively in ‘ōlelo Hawai’i. Known as Nā Maka o Kana, this is the only ‘ōlelo Hawai’i news publication currently in circulation, but features some really key content such as stories from pūnana leo graduates, and the dreams and goals of these graduates.

Today, beyond the core teaching/learning resources produced by Hale Kuamo’o, there are a number of other ‘ōlelo Hawai’i resources suitable for pūnana leo audiences or relevant to the wider language revitalisation movement. Examples include ‘Ōiwi TV episodes; electronic libraries and online dictionaries; smartphone apps; music playlists; and books written by independent authors. While many of those I met with in Hawai’i described how the funding climate for the production of distinctly Hawaiian educational materials is often (and currently) fairly dry, the gradual re-emergence of ‘ōlelo Hawai’i resources is nevertheless promising.

ENROLMENT/ATTENDANCE

The target age group for pūnana leo attendance has typically been three and four-year-old children, although all children over two and under six years old are eligible to attend. In more recent years, some pūnana leo sites have also initiated adjoining Hi’ipêpê Infant Programs, following the same philosophies, protocols and pedagogies as pūnana leo preschools but aimed at attendees aged between nine months and two years. Pūnana Leo o Hilo was the first site to have established a neighbouring Hi’ipêpê Infant Program and, since the Program’s establishment in 2006, staff have recognised how introducing children to ‘ōlelo Hawai’i immersion from the youngest age positively prepares them for their pūnana leo education, as well as for long-term Hawaiian-medium learning experiences right through to the post-secondary school level.

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47 I was quite impressed with the range and quality of bilingual and Hawaiian-only publications available when visiting a mainstream bookstore in Hilo. Even among the English collection there were a number of books about distinctly Hawaiian concepts of aloha and ‘ohana, and re-tellings of Hawaiian legends.

48 Some suggested this may be because of a perception that these materials belong to a more ‘niche’ market rather than a massively profitable mainstream public market.
Most pūnana leo are open between the weekday hours of 7:15am and 17:00pm. While pūnana leo enrolment applications are open to all families, priority placements are reserved for families who speak ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i as their primary language in the home. In enrolling their child(ren) in pūnana leo, parents/families must pledge their commitment to speaking ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i; to endorsing values or ethics of aloha (love), kuleana (responsibility), na‘auao (learning) and ‘ohana (family); and to correspondingly supporting the mauli of not only their child(ren) but also of their ‘ohana at large. They must also agree to fully participate in a number of pūnana leo activities, as further outlined in the ‘Parent/Family and Community Involvement’ section of this Report.

It is because of the ‘ohana-based focus of pūnana leo that unenrolment is very much lamented. That is, when a child is lost to a pūnana leo, so too can his or her wider family and community be. To support families’ access to pūnana leo education, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo does accept and administer tuition assistance sponsorships from public or private philanthropic sources. Because, by choice, pūnana leo sites also undergo child care licencing processes through the Department of Human Services, parents/families of pūnana leo attendees can also be eligible for state childcare fee subsidies. Tuition fees are directed to ‘Aha Pūnana Leo in monthly or annual instalments depending on a family’s preference, and at around the average cost of childcare across Hawai‘i.

Ultimately, it is important to recognise that, in accordance with ‘ohana values and expectations, signing up one’s child to attend a pūnana leo preschool effectively means signing up the child’s wider family to contribute to the ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i revitalisation process. It is hoped that a child’s – and his or her family’s – language learning journey will be an ongoing one, for which reason some pūnana leo have built bridging partnerships with neighbouring Hawaiian-medium primary schools, allowing children to begin familiarising with the next level of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion in the months leading up to their pūnana leo graduation.

PARENT/FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The idea of parent duties or service (‘hana makua’) has been integral within pūnana leo preschools since their early emergence. As part of the pūnana leo enrolment agreement, parents must commit to participating in the following four activities:

1. Hui kīpaepae – if not already taking part in external ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i classes, parents are expected to attend classes at their local pūnana leo. Hui kīpaepae are regular linguistic-cultural classes run on site, generally on a weekly basis. As well as focusing on the grammatical elements of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i learning, these classes also provide parents with an opportunity to learn more about the wider historical context of Hawaiian language revitalisation. If unable to attend the on-site learning sessions, parents are permitted to instead engage with ‘Aha Pūnana Leo’s Niulahiki Distance Learning program. Focusing on their personal linguistic skill development is an important part of parents’ commitment to ensuring that the ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i learning that children experience in pūnana leo can be consistently and constructively reinforced in the home.

2. Hālāwai makua/‘ohana – maintaining a presence at monthly parent/family meetings provides a means for parents to engage in planning and discussion around ongoing and special events at their pūnana leo. It is also at these meetings that formalised parent committees (Kōmike Makua) can present their progress reports for the group to review, reflect on, and respond to.

3. Ho‘iho‘i honua – giving back to the pūnana leo community by contributing a few hours of voluntary cleaning, fundraising or wider support each month helps parents to demonstrate their pride in pūnana leo environments, as well as their personal sense of responsibility or accountability within the language revitalisation movement. When visiting Pūnana Leo o Hilo, a roster of ho‘iho‘i honua
tasks, and the names of the parents among which these tasks were distributed, was displayed as positive reminder and act of recognition at the front door.

4. Lā ‘ohana – setting aside designated days or dates for staff, parents and families to socialise as a collective pūnana leo ‘ohana can be an important way to maintain morale and momentum, and to celebrate shared learnings and milestones along the language revitalisation journey.

Beyond engagements and events within pūnana leo, it can also be really enriching and encouraging for children, Elders, parents and wider family members to take part in language-focused celebrations with the wider community. For example, at the local level, Pūnana Leo o Hilo participates in Pūlama Mauli Ola and the Merrie Monarch Festival Parade each year, both of which involve proud displays and demonstrations of native Hawaiian linguistic-cultural traditions. At the whole-state level, ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i Month has continued to be celebrated every February since 2012. In 2013, the State of Hawai‘i even declared March 16th to be specifically celebrated as ‘Aha Pūnana Leo Day. These kinds of community events help to raise awareness about, and increase a shared drive behind, the ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i revitalisation movement, and the place of pūnana leo within it.

COSTS/FUNDING

Many of the financial matters pertaining to pūnana leo are streamlined and centrally coordinated through ‘Aha Pūnana Leo. For example, it is through ‘Aha Pūnana Leo that pūnana leo staff wages are paid, and appropriate pūnana leo properties are purchased. A large amount of ‘Aha Pūnana Leo’s income is generated through pūnana leo tuition fees, although the organisation has, over the years, also received funding through government sources such as the US Department of Education and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. Grants received from other private or philanthropic sources, such as the Lannan Foundation and Kellogg Foundation, have helped to reduce reliance on government funding, and the fundraising efforts sometimes engaged in by parents as part of their ho‘iho‘i honua commitments further support the generation of income on the ground.

As ‘Aha Pūnana Leo is a not-for-profit organisation, it has a focus on directing funds to those resources and initiatives that are not necessarily oriented towards economic profitability, but that can best serve language revitalisation goals and outcomes, not only immediately but into the future. For example, in administering a post-secondary education scholarship program (Lamakū) for several years, ‘Aha Pūnana Leo has seen many of the scholarship recipients subsequently enter into teaching roles within Hawaiian medium/immersion schools, representing a really meaningful and sustainable ‘return on investment’ beyond the economic sense. ‘Aha Pūnana Leo also runs an Indigenous outreach or exchange program known as Hale Kipa ‘Ōiwi, which provides other Native American groups with the opportunity to visit pūnana leo staff and sites, and bring back insights and inspirations that have significant potential to progress First Languages revitalisation not only within Hawai‘i but across the USA.

ASSESSMENT

Pūnana leo preschools have opted to take part in the standard state Child Care Licencing Program, coordinated by the Department of Human Services. Licensure of a childcare service supports parents/carers of children enrolled in that service to be eligible for state childcare fee subsidies, thereby helping to increase pūnana leo accessibility and feasibility. As the assessment criteria pertaining to childcare licencing is focused on the capacity of a service to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children enrolled, pūnana leo providers have not typically taken issue with the regulations relating to licencing, given that health, safety and wellbeing are qualities which pūnana leo have already long worked to promote.
Part of promoting safe, comfortable and self-esteem-building environments for *keiki* means that formal assessment of linguistic and wider skill development is minimised within *pūnana leo*, instead set aside for when children enter into school-age environments. The idea is that this does not hinder children’s potential to perform well later in life; rather, it takes away the stress and discouragement that can come through formal testing to instead instil the self-assurance and confidence in children that is so critical to tackling further education. Recent evidence of *pūnana leo* graduates’ longer-term learning success includes twelve senior students from the Nāwahiokalani‘ōpu‘u immersion school (which is partnered with Pūnana Leo o Hilo) being among the first recipients – and indeed the largest group of recipients from a single school – of the state Department of Education’s Seal of Biliteracy award. This award recognises those students who demonstrate strong proficiency in the state’s two official languages (English and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i)49, and receiving one as an ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i speaker represents a really positive feat, given not only the endangered status of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i, but also the commonly acknowledged challenges of standardised testing. That is, many of those I had the opportunity to meet with in Hawai‘i explained how standardised school assessment paradigms tend still to inequitably stem from an English framework, which doesn’t necessarily translate entirely clearly or fairly for Hawaiian language immersion students.

A further important feat when it comes to questions of *pūnana leo* assessment was made public in 2014, when ‘Aha Pūnana Leo, and its network of inter-island immersion preschool sites and Hi‘ipēpē Infant Programs, became the world’s first early childhood program conducted through an endangered and Indigenous language to receive full accreditation through the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC). As well as an attention to general quality assurance in education, what makes WINHEC accreditation unique is its astute assessment of diverse Indigenous-serving educational environments, and the ability of each to accommodate its respective community’s particular pedagogies and prerogatives by being:

- framed by the Indigenous philosophies of the community it serves;
- soundly conceived and intelligently devised;
- based on a programmatic integration of Indigenous culture(s), language(s) and worldviews;
- purposefully accomplished in a manner that should continue to merit confidence by the Indigenous constituencies being served.50

‘Aha Pūnana Leo has thus been recognised as an international leader in providing positive early years education rooted in Indigenous language immersion. Such recognition helps to generate inspiration, and enables those involved in Language Nest programs across the globe to see the great potential inherent in their work.

**POST-PRESCHOOL LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

As mentioned above, the first class to have completed the entirety of their education through Hawaiian immersion in more than one hundred years graduated from the Nāwahiokalani‘ōpu‘u immersion school, adjacent to Pūnana Leo o Hilo, in 1999. The continuing possibility for children to move from a *pūnana leo* preschool environment to an immersion primary and secondary school environment plays a pertinent part in ensuring the strength and sustainability of the ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i revitalisation movement. ‘Aha Pūnana Leo has pushed for the state of Hawai‘i to support a preschool-school and private-public language learning continuum in this regard, and there are currently more than twenty *Kula Kaiapuni Hawai‘i* across at least four different islands. Teaching within *Kula Kaiapuni Hawai‘i* is typically carried out through total ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion until around Grade 5, when English is first formally

49 (or either of the official languages and one additional language)
introduced, although there may be some variation to this model. The degree to which Kula Kaiapuni Hawai‘i curricula are similar or different to the mainstream English curriculum may also vary. In some schools, the curriculum tends to be a more direct translation of the English curriculum (based on a ‘teach the same content that you would teach in English but do so in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i’ approach) whereas, in other schools, there is a much stronger focus on removing ‘Western’ curriculum content and replacing it with new content, stemming from a distinctly Hawaiian worldview. During our personal communication, Education Specialist Manuwai Peters explained that, generally speaking, teachers in Hawai‘i have quite a lot of academic freedom in terms of the learnings that they can introduce in their classrooms, particularly at the elementary level. He also explained that, on the whole, there tends to be more curriculum convergence than divergence between Hawaiian and English-medium schools, with a recognition that bi-culturalism can be positively promoted by respectfully teaching Hawaiian and ‘Western’ concepts/content alongside each other.

Outside of Kula Kaiapuni Hawai‘i specifically, ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i can still be offered in public schools as a Languages Other Than English (LOTE) subject, and there are a few distinct units or course credits within wider subject areas such as History and Social Sciences that focus on native Hawaiian history and culture. In response to the 1978 State Constitutional Amendment, calling on the state to “promote the study of Hawaiian culture, history and language,” the Department of Education established its Hawaiian Studies Program in 1980, which continues to be mandated across all public schools. Hawaiian Studies is not its own course or content area, but is instead seen as an inter-disciplinary, cross-curriculum priority, intended to be integrated into all other subject areas. As such, there is no stand-alone or prescriptive Hawaiian Studies curriculum, with Hawaiian Studies programming able to be fairly flexibly applied to each school’s local context. One significant and shared feature of the Hawaiian Studies Program in every elementary school is access to government funding for a Kūpuna Component – an initiative to support the employment of Elders to share their personal experiences and to teach, part-time, aspects of Hawaiian history, language, arts and wider culture.

To build on the linguistic-cultural knowledges that children are exposed to in the (pre)school context, whether or not through ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion, there are also a number of tertiary-level studies in Hawaiian Language, Hawaiian Culture and Hawaiian Studies more broadly. Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke’elikolani College of Hawaiian Language at the University at Hilo represents the first College in the USA to be conducted entirely in an Indigenous language, and it continues to offer a suite of courses delivered exclusively in ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i today. Tertiary institutions such as Ka Haka ‘Ula O Ke’elikolani thereby provide a positive platform for those accessing pūnana leo education in their earliest years to continue on a path of ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i immersion well into their adult years.

Beyond formal education environments, some adults will also commence or continue their language learning journey through informal study groups. For example, I saw a short advertisement in a local Hilo news publication inviting motivated learners at any level to support each other in increasing their ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i skills by participating in a weekly study group session at the local public library. Affordable online study options such as Niulolahiki Distance Learning and a range of other e-learning applications further foster ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i learning opportunities, often regardless of one’s age or location.

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51 For example, a school may choose not to celebrate ‘Western’ holidays such as Thanksgiving, or may decide to prioritise the teaching of Hawaiian lunar cycle calendars above the Gregorian calendar.

52 The state Department of Education is currently scoping and strategising around making more Hawaiian Studies electives available.


54 While the Department of Education does provide some support in offering frameworks and informal assessment rubrics for the Hawaiian Studies Program, it is, ultimately, a school’s Principal/faculty staff that have the final say in decision-making processes around how Hawaiian Studies will be integrated into curriculum activities.

55 Note that some schools experience difficulties in finding available Elders to employ as part of the Kūpuna Component, in which case younger people with a good degree of knowledge and experience, and who are well reputable within their communities, can also be employed.
**RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING/RESOURCES**

- Hawai‘i State Department of Education (2017) *Hawaiian language immersion program*, Hawai‘i DOE, Honolulu, [http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/HawaiianEducation/Pages/translation.aspx](http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/HawaiianEducation/Pages/translation.aspx)
- Hawai‘i State Department of Education (2017) *Hawaiian Studies*, Hawai‘i DOE, Honolulu, [http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/HawaiianEducation/Pages/HSP.aspx](http://www.hawaiipublicschools.org/TeachingAndLearning/StudentLearning/HawaiianEducation/Pages/HSP.aspx)
- University of Hawai‘i at Hilo (2017) *Hale Kuamo‘o Hawaiian Language Center*, University of Hawai‘i at Hilo, [https://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/hale-kuamoo-center-for-hawaiian-language](https://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/hale-kuamoo-center-for-hawaiian-language)
Learnings from Leg #3: Canada

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

Meeting with Dr Suzanne Gessner and familiarising with the work of the First Peoples’ Cultural Council

Alongside her role as Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics at Vancouver’s University of Victoria, Dr Suzanne Gessner has spent several years contributing to the work of the First Peoples’ Cultural Council, a provincial Crown Corporation with a mission to provide leadership for the revitalisation of First Languages, as well as Aboriginal arts and cultures more generally, across British Columbia. Suzanne kindly made the time to meet with me while I was in transit in Vancouver airport, which was a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the First Peoples’ Cultural Council’s role in providing financial, training, educational resourcing and advocacy support for Language Nest programs and wider language revitalisation initiatives. Suzanne has, through her work, been able to engage with a number of Language Nest programs across the province of British Columbia, so it was great to gauge her personal comparative reflections around the question of ‘best practice.’ Furthermore, I really appreciated hearing Suzanne’s insights regarding the consultation processes around Prime Minister Trudeau’s 2016 announcement of the federal government’s commitment to developing legislation to preserve and promote First Languages, which the First Peoples’ Cultural Council has been closely involved in.

Visiting the Chief Atahm School (T’selcéwtqen Clleq’mel’ten)

Based on the Adams Lake Reserve in the province of British Columbia, the Chief Atahm School (T’selcéwtqen Clleq’mel’ten) was established in 1991, and evolved from the very first Language Nest program to have emerged in the province four years prior, the Secwepemc Ka Language Nest. Today, the Chief Atahm School continues to run a Cséyetseten (Nest) program for preschool-aged children, as well as providing education through total Secwepemctsin immersion throughout children’s first few primary school years. Even after English begins to be introduced into the curriculum in the upper primary years, the School maintains a strong focus on continuing Secwepemc linguistic-cultural input right through into the secondary school years. It was valuable to have been able to visit the Chief Atahm School just as staff were returning from the summer holiday period – this provided me with a really productive perspective into the ways in which planning and professional development processes can effectively play out in anticipation of a new school year. My deepest gratitude goes out to Dr Kathryn Michel, co-founder of the Chief Atahm School, as well as the wider staffing team, for the warm welcome, and for sharing your incredible fight, fire and light.

Note that the Canada leg of my Churchill Fellowship journey was based solely in the province of British Columbia which, in being the Province with the greatest linguistic diversity in Canada, arguably provides the best comparative context to Australia. This leg was also particularly focused on the Chief Atahm School’s Secwepemc Language Nest example which, in being the first established Language Nest in the Province with the longest sustained success, serves as an exemplar case study.
BC-BASED LANGUAGE NESTS AND THE SECWEPEMCE CASE: SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNINGS

LANGUAGE GUIDE

While there is a great diversity of First Languages across British Columbia, and across Canada as a whole, listed below are just a few terms of significance in Secwepemctsín – the language of instruction within the Chief Atahm School/Cséyseten, where the Canada leg of my trip was predominantly focused.

- Cséyseten – nest
- K̓wseltknéws – ‘we are all related’
- Knucwectsúts – ‘help yourself’
- Mellélc – ‘take time for yourself’
- Slexléxs – ‘develop wisdom’
- Stsptekwle – traditional Secwepemc stories
- Qweqwetsín – ‘honour the spiritual’

BRIEF BACKGROUND

Of the countries visited throughout my Churchill Fellowship journey, Canada represents perhaps the most comparable context to Australia in terms of its linguistic diversity. The province of British Columbia, where my Canada-based research was focused, is also where Canada’s greatest linguistic diversity is focused. There are approximately two hundred First Nations communities in British Columbia with more than thirty distinct First Languages, making up more than fifty percent of the multitude of First Languages spoken across the country. Unfortunately, many of Canada’s First Languages have been critically impacted on by mandated colonial government policies of assimilation. The introduction of the residential school system in the latter half of the nineteenth century was particularly injurious whereby, among other injustices, First Nations children were forcibly removed from their homes and made to attend educational institutions that forbade the use of their First Languages. Compulsory attendance at residential schools continued until well into the twentieth century, with the last federally operated residential school only closing as late as the 1990s. It was, however, also during the 1990s that the Chief Atahm School was established on Adams Lake reserve, having evolved from a small group of parents’ set up of the Secwepemc Ka Language Nest initiative. Inspired by the kōhanga reo model and movement in Aotearoa, the Secwepemc Ka became the first Language Nest program in the province of British Columbia and has since inspired the emergence of other Language Nest initiatives in BC and beyond.

POLITICO-LEGAL CONTEXT

It is worth looking at the politico-legal context that has led to, and/or continues to interact with, Language Nest-style initiatives in Canada at both the federal and provincial level. To consider first the federal politico-legal context, the passage of the Indian Act in 1876 and its various amendments over time cannot be ignored. For example, amendments such as the 1884 amendment to force First Nations youth into (residential) schools, and the 1885 amendment to prohibit particular religious ceremonies and dances, have seriously impacted on the continuation of linguistic-cultural traditions among Canada’s First Nations communities. Perhaps ironically, however, it is aspects of this very same Act that have nevertheless been able to have been drawn on by First Nations communities to positively drive language revitalisation initiatives. For example, the very fact that Indian reserve areas fall under federal governance according to the Act, while Canadian education jurisdictions are governed
at the provincial/territorial level\textsuperscript{57}, means that (pre)schools operating on reserve areas can effectively exploit certain operational liberties – they are, in many ways, able to operate outside of the confines of provincial/territorial frameworks and curricula, for instance. It is for such reasons that First Nations leaders and communities have successfully worked to oppose a range of attempted amendments, repeals or revocations of the Indian Act, such as the 1969 \textit{Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy}, which sought to abolish the Indian Act and thereby eliminate reserve areas and remove ‘Indian’ from being a distinct legal status.

One very recent consideration at the federal politico-legal level is Prime Minister Trudeau’s 2016 announcement of the Canadian government’s commitment to developing legislation to preserve and promote First Languages. The First Peoples’ Cultural Council has been closely involved in the consultation processes around this prospective legislation and, following the hosting of a national dialogue session on Indigenous languages, put forward the following priorities for investment:

- Indigenous rights, legislation and policy in Canada;
- Community-based Indigenous language revitalisation;
- Indigenous language education;
- Indigenous languages in urban areas.\textsuperscript{58}

These priorities were proposed together with a series of associated recommendations, as well as guiding principles for action including collaboration, accessibility, sustainability, belonging, identity and guarantee.\textsuperscript{59} If actively listened to in the continued development and implementation of legislation, these kinds of priorities and principles have strong potential to positively influence the politico-legal backing of Canadian Language Nest-style initiatives into the future.

It is also important to appreciate more localised politico-legal achievements of relevance to Language Nests in Canada. For example, in British Columbia, the introduction of the First Peoples’ Heritage, Language and Culture Act in 1996 represents a formal provincial-level commitment to protecting, revitalising and enhancing First Nations’ languages, cultures and arts; increasing the sharing and understanding of knowledge within First Nations and non-First Nations communities alike; and heightening the appreciation and acceptance of the wealth of cultural diversity among all living within British Columbia.\textsuperscript{60} It is also in response to this legislation that the First Peoples’ Cultural Council was established, with the Council continuing to represent a key source of funding, training and further resourcing for Language Nests and wider language revitalisation programs. In other parts of Canada, official status has been bestowed on First Languages in notable, even if isolated, cases. For example, in Canada’s newest territory of Nunavut, both Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun are recognised as official languages alongside the national languages of English and French. The Official Languages Act of Northwest Territories further recognises eleven official languages, nine of which are First Languages. Citizens of these territories are thereby entitled to access services in the official languages, and to make requests to use them when engaging with government matters.

Overall, while colonial politico-legal powers have historically hindered the intergenerational transmission of First Languages, and while there are arguably many amendments yet to be made, clever

\textsuperscript{57} As per the British North America Act of 1867, each province or territory holds the autonomous responsibility to govern and operate its own education system, meaning that Education falls outside of the scope of federal jurisdiction.


interpretations of, or advancements in, government laws and policies have also shown the capacity to beneficially back language revitalisation initiatives.

**GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES/SUPPORT**

Governance, management and institutional influences or support pertaining to Language Nests across Canada may vary depending on the particular program and the particular local context within which it is situated.

In looking at the Chief Atahm School and its Cséyseten (Nest) program as an example, it is clear that parents are intended to represent key drivers and decision-makers when it comes to management matters. Indeed, it was a small group of parents who first established the Secwepemc Ka Language Nest and the Chief Atahm School that evolved from it. While the School and the Nest used to be more separately administered and operated entities, today there is much more of a shared and streamlined relationship between the two. Regular parent meetings are held with a fairly consistent turn out, and it is during such meetings that parents are able to put forward their say or vote in decision-making matters. Parent meetings are currently being facilitated by the School Principal, but there is movement towards a model of parents setting their own meeting roles and agendas more formally into the future. In setting up the School’s management committee, it was previously the case that all parents of enrolled students would serve on the committee. Nowadays, however, the committee structure has become somewhat less stringent so as to flexibly accommodate the growing number of parents entering the workforce, as well as to ensure that those serving on the committee are putting genuine desire and energy into doing so. There is one seat reserved on the committee for a youth representative (namely a former Chief Atahm School student) and two seats reserved for wider community members (whether parents or otherwise).

Outside of the more immediate institution of family, other institutional influences on, or interrelationships with, the Chief Atahm School’s governance, management or operations include:

- **The Adams Lake Indian Band** – The Adam’s Lake Indian Band belongs to the Secwepemc Nation and is in a position to provide political leadership and guidance, as well as administrative support for programs and services, for the benefit of community members. The Band comprises a specific Education Department through which school supplies and buses can be applied/registered for, and further direct input into Chief Atahm School matters may depend on the particular Chief and Council elected.

- **The First Nations Schools Association of British Columbia** – Chief Atahm School is currently a member of the First Nations Schools Association of British Columbia, established as a collective and not-for-profit support organisation for First Nation controlled schools across the province. While membership is not mandatory, it extends possibilities for staff from diverse First Nations Schools to engage in shared professional development experiences and exchanges.

- **Research and funding partners** – Research partnerships with Universities represent an opportunity to evaluate aspects of the Chief Atahm School’s language revitalisation approach, as well as an avenue for attracting and reinvesting funding into sustainably managing this approach. There is of course also a shared sense of accountability between the School and funding partners such as the First Peoples’ Cultural Council. The First Peoples’ Cultural Council is itself committed to annually reviewing its governance policies, and its Board and Advisory Committee are expected to adhere to meaningful guiding principles such as incorporating First Nations values into governance practices and ensuring broad representation of BC-based linguistic-cultural communities.

In all, in my conversations with those in Canada, it was often indicated that the strongest results in terms of Language Nest management tended to arise out of governing/coordinating bodies that showed...
internal accountability, stability and integrity, and that were able to consistently replicate these qualities in their interactions with other bodies of influence.

PHILOSOPHIES, PROTOCOLS AND PEDAGOGIES

The First Peoples’ Cultural Council advocates that, while communities across British Columbia and Canada as a whole can be very different (and should be actively recognised and as celebrated as such accordingly), the following core Language Nest principles can nevertheless resonate with, and be responded to within, all local community contexts: an ‘all or nothing,’ full immersion approach to passing on language to young children; the incorporation of culture into all aspects of the program; and the involvement of Elders, parents and family members in day-to-day program activities.

For the Chief Atahm School and its Cséyseten initiative, these overarching principles are simultaneously built into, and built out of, its own localised set of core principles, including:

1. **KWSELTKNÉWS** – the notion that ‘we are all related,’ and that one must therefore be mindful of, and responsible for, the way in which people’s attitudes and actions impact on the earth and each other;
2. **KNUCWECTSÚT.S** – the imperative to ‘help yourself’ to be the best you can be, and to finish what you start, for the benefit of the greater good;
3. **MELLÉLC** – a reminder to ‘take time for yourself’ to healthily balance both work and rest, and to reflect on, celebrate and reaffirm the significance of your values, purpose and achievements;
4. **SLEXLÉXS** – an acknowledgement that all people are born natural and life-long learners and that, even if through diverse strategies, all can continue to ‘develop wisdom’ beyond the ‘Western,’ ‘academic’ sense alone;
5. **QWEQWETSÍN** – the need to nourish and ‘honour the spiritual’ within oneself, and between other beings, the earth, and the universe.

Each of these core principles were shared with the School by community Elders, and are based on a foundational belief that each individual has a gift; that families, educational environments and the wider community have a collective responsibility to foster children’s gifts; and that all individuals must maintain an active commitment to developing their own gifts to their fullest potential.

There are a range of strategies for effectively embedding and enacting these core principles in pedagogical practice. For example, **KWSELTKNÉWS** can be encouraged through modelling environmentally sound routines such as recycling; **KNUCWECTSÚT.S** can be facilitated by providing age-appropriate problem-solving experiences centred on ‘learning by doing’; **MELLÉLC** can be maintained by setting clear daily schedules that strike a clear and constructive balance between work, rest and play; **SLEXLÉXS** can be upheld by integrating contemporary learning with traditional teaching in flexible and diverse ways; and **QWEQWETSÍN** can be nurtured through introducing children to Secwepemc stories, prayers and other forms of expressing gratitude for the reciprocal, spiritual interrelationship between people, the land, and the universe.

In terms of approaches to immersion-based learning/teaching protocols specifically, it was described to me that staff within the Chief Atahm School’s Language Nest sometimes draw on a kind of ‘contextual immersion’ strategy – a method whereby, even if staff are not fully fluent in the Secwepemctsín

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61 [even if only gradually rather than instantaneously, depending on the status of the particular language concerned]
language, they have worked to develop sufficient context-specific vocabulary knowledge, and an appropriate bank of ‘survival phrases,’ to nevertheless facilitate a full immersion environment for the particular early childhood setting. Staff understand the value in providing multisensorial and hands-on learning experiences for children, and to simply let the language ‘seep into’ children ‘by osmosis’ without glamourising it so that the language is considered a normal part of life from the earliest age. In general, the emphasis is not on explicit, obvious or forced teaching. Rather, through play-based activities and standard daily routines such as hand-washing and toilet training, staff are able to not just talk to/at children, but encourage authentic conversational exchange. When structured teaching sessions (around content such as vowel sounds, calendar dates or weather phenomena) take place, it is typically only for a duration of around ten or twenty minutes, and still largely on a fun, play basis.

Right through into the school-based year groups, Total Physical Response (TPR – an action-based methodology for stimulating the development of core communicative vocabulary) and TPR storytelling (incorporating stories into standard TPR learning experiences) is recommended as a teaching tool by the Chief Atahm team. Wider tools or tips for facilitating immersion-based learning in Language Nest environments, as shared by representatives of the Chief Atahm School team and the First Peoples’ Cultural Council, include:

- Exploiting visual and non-verbal cues (pictures, objects, gestures and actions) to clarify or reinforce accompanying verbal messages, and to avoid reverting to English;
- Repeating routines, and repeating focus words/phrases within familiar routines so that children can become well accustomed to them;
- Using a variety of yes/no questions, choice questions and open-ended questions to cater for, and informally assess, children’s varying levels of understanding and (re)producing language items;
- Recasting or expanding on children’s spontaneous language to repeat correct forms and encourage learning progression;
- Asking children to imitate words/phrases modelled by their teachers; asking questions that require a similarly structured response to a previously modelled set of example sentences; scaffolding sentence starters for children to complete; and always praising and positively reinforcing children’s language attempts and achievements.  

As an overarching comment, my time in Canada certainly reminded me of the importance of simultaneously recognising the shared, as well as the meaningfully individualised, philosophies, protocols and pedagogies played out between diverse Language Nest programs.

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The physical environment of Canadian Language Nest programs can at times be connected to a program’s particular origins. For example, those Language Nest programs which transitioned out of former Aboriginal Head Start programs or standard preschool settings may operate in environments that continue to bear some resemblance to the preceding institution and its initial purpose, even if the goal is to gradually shape the physical environment to more strongly reflect the unique linguistic-cultural ‘character’ of the First Nation context concerned.

Having been established independently of any pre-existing educational institution, the Chief Atahm School and Csęyeteten setting has been strongly built upon a meaningfully individualised vision of “a Secwepemc-speaking community living in balance with nature.” Located on Indian reserve area

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67 Aboriginal Head Start is a national early intervention initiative funded by the Government of Canada and focused on a community-based approach to enhancing the development and school readiness of First Nations children.

comprising a large lake and mountainous geography, children in fact spend a lot of their learning time outdoors, focusing on respecting and connecting with the natural environment through field trip, fishing, deer skinning and traditional cooking-type educational opportunities. Solar panels have been erected on the School building to further promote environmental sustainability, and a glasshouse has been accessibly built so that gardening can be incorporated into both curriculum and community activities.

For indoor learning purposes, the Language Nest is currently run out of a very modest, homely building, in a sense serving as a reminder of the value of working towards speaking Secwepemcxtsin within home and wider everyday environments in a natural, normalised way. The building comprises three small rooms, often used to separate groups of children out during daily sessions so that staff can provide really focused attention, and intensive, individualised learning experiences, for all child participants.

Today, the wider Chief Atahm School building could be described as quite architecturally sophisticated, incorporating modern structures that nevertheless draw on aspects of traditional cultural design work. In its earlier days, however, the School building was also very modest in nature. Indeed, much of the School’s furniture was produced by staff and students, allowing for cost-effective building development while simultaneously fostering basic design/craftsmanship skills and positive ‘learning by doing’ experiences.

Ultimately, the Chief Atahm School and its feeder Language Nest program present a clear and effective example of how staff, students and community can be connected to key program visions, values and principles through the physical environment.

**STAFFING, EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

As with other parts of the world, staff committed to working within Canadian Language Nest environments often ‘wear many hats’ – commonly taking on much more than classroom teaching roles alone and indeed playing a part in language researching, recording and archiving; resource creation and building refurbishment; and everyday business such as budgeting, cooking and cleaning.

In considering the Chief Atahm example, the staffing team is comprised of teachers\(^6\) who formerly worked within the public school system; Chief Atahm School graduates (former students); community Elders; and otherwise motivated community members with appropriate Secwepemcxtsin language skills.

Generally, if someone demonstrates a clear interest and commitment to joining the staffing team, existing staff will keenly do their best to find and fund a position for them. Sometimes, particularly during the summer, the Chief Atahm School will also host a few trainees who can meaningfully contribute to the School’s work by bringing with them skills in illustration or design work for curriculum resource production, for example. A typical day in the Language Nest specifically would see children supported by an Elder; an adult learner-as-teacher; a semi-fluent assistant; occasional trainees; and any parents who choose to sit in on their children’s learning. Because teachers and teaching assistants may not be fully fluent speakers, they effectively enact the same ‘learning by doing’ approach that they encourage among the children. The few remaining fluent Elders thereby represent an invaluable human resource for students and staff alike. According to Dr Suzanne Gessner, a staffing team that constitutes a core group of young people supported by a core group of Elders can be a really powerful model – able

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\(^6\) Note that, while essentially all of the core teaching staff at the Chief Atahm School hold their teaching certificates, finding qualified teachers for Language Nest programs has been asserted to be a generalised challenge across Canada. That is, a skilled language speaker may not always be a skilled language teacher, and may not possess the most appropriate credentials. Some people will enter into language teaching positions through completing certificate-level courses and assuming teaching assistant-type roles, although these roles are not always well remunerated and aren’t necessarily conducive to leadership capacity within the classroom. Note that, as explained in the ‘Curriculum’ section below, those Language Nest programs that choose to forgo formal licensing through the Ministry of Children and Families and instead operate under a licencing exemption have more freedom to hire Elders and fluent speakers as Language Nest staff rather than certified Early Childhood Educators necessarily.
to channel the essential expertise of Elders alongside the energy, innovation and ‘can-do’ mindset of younger generations alike.

Having had the opportunity to witness some of their language immersion planning and refresher training in action, it is clear that Chief Atahm School staff are committed to stimulating ongoing collaborative learning and co-motivated professional development. As well as promoting continual internal upskilling, so too does the School offer up meaningful professional development experiences to externals – it coordinates an annual First Nations Languages Conference and TPR Summer Institute; can conduct workshops and consultation sessions for those interested in immersive, community-level language education and revitalisation initiatives; and upholds an openness and generosity when it comes to sharing teaching materials/methods with wider community groups.

Language Nest staff from the Chief Atahm School and beyond are also able to access relevant professional development opportunities through bodies such as the First Nations Schools Association and the First Peoples’ Cultural Council. Examples of training available through the First Peoples’ Cultural Council include:

- Language Nest training – in conjunction with Dr Kathryn Michel, the First Peoples’ Cultural Council has developed a comprehensive and freely available Language Nest Handbook for B.C. First Nations Communities. It has also released a corresponding Online Companion Toolkit, alongside a Language Nest Online Orientation Course.

- Master-Apprentice training – after working with Professor Leanne Hinton for many years, the First Peoples’ Cultural Council has effectively adopted and adapted aspects of the North American Master-Apprentice model to publish B.C’s Master-Apprentice Language Program Handbook, tailored to the British Columbian context specifically. Generally focused on adult learners, the Master-Apprentice model involves a form of language immersion mentorship between a fluent speaker (‘master’) and an aspiring speaker (‘apprentice’). It is not uncommon for representatives from the First Peoples’ Cultural Council to engage with community groups who are seeking to start a Language Nest program, but who could well benefit from first – or simultaneously – starting a Master-Apprentice program.

- Language Policy and Planning training – this training is designed to support communities to take effective, collaborative responsibility for the revitalisation of their languages into the future. To guide this training, A Guide to Language Policy and Planning for B.C. First Nations Communities has been put together and made available by the First Peoples’ Cultural Council.

The First Peoples’ Cultural Council has also recently been piloting a training program based on a successful Sami model. This program is designed for ‘silent speakers’ – those who do hold Indigenous language knowledge but who, after confronting experiences such as being forced into residential schools, have become too scared or feel too ashamed to use it. It draws on cognitive behavioural therapy to positively shift silent speakers’ psychology to support them to feel safe, comfortable and confident to speak again. Such a program has great potential to strengthen the pool of speakers able to contribute to Language Nest-style initiatives into the future.

Furthermore, returning to the Chief Atahm School and Cséyseten example, it is important to appreciate that the emergence of Secwepemcitsin immersion as an early years language revitalisation strategy was very much inspired by the Māori kōhanga reo movement. Indeed, fundraising efforts directed towards facilitating different delegate trips from Cstélen (the Adams River and Adams Lake areas) to Aotearoa and vice versa, has allowed for deeply encouraging and enlightening professional exchanges.
Positive professional development outcomes for Language Nest staff can thereby arise out of a careful attention to internally motivated and managed staff upskilling opportunities, as well as to external (even international) evidence, expertise and inspiration.

**CURRICULUM**

Curriculum design and delivery can be dependent on whether or not a Language Nest program has undergone formal licencing through the Ministry of Children and Families. Some Language Nest teams choose to forgo formal licencing and instead operate under a licencing exemption, particularly if they feel this would give them more freedom to adapt everyday curriculum activities to better suit the linguistic-cultural context concerned; reduce pressure to meet certain provincial programming standards so that the program logic, content and delivery methods can be tailored to community-level priorities; hire Elders and fluent language speakers rather than certified Early Childhood Educators necessarily; do cultural field trips, and serve children traditional foods. It was certainly expressed to me that, if a community feels too compromised or counter-productive in confining its curriculum to a mainstream framework, it runs the risk of ‘re-colonising’ itself.

In the case of the Chief Atahm School’s Cséyseten program, organic, play-based learning that connects children to the natural environment tends to take precedence over rigid curriculum requirements. By the time children enter into the Chief Atahm School years, the curriculum is based around approximately thirty-two selected sites of significance to the Secwepemc Nation, and the cultural, environmental and wider knowledges tied to these sites. Annually, around eight sites are focused on per year group to frame curriculum activities. As mentioned in the ‘Physical Environment’ section above, these activities can include field trips, fishing, deer skinning and traditional cooking-type educational opportunities. To further feed into the curriculum, the Chief Atahm School is running a concurrent Connecting Stories Research Project, focused on documenting the traditional place names of sites that community Elders are connected to, and traditional stories surrounding those sites.

Currently, classes are carried out via full Secwepemcts’in immersion up until the end of Grade 4. After Grade 4, English literacy and numeracy begin to be introduced into the curriculum in an intensive yet effective way. It was extremely encouraging to hear ex-Chief Atahm School students describe that they found English classes ‘too easy’ by the time they transitioned into public schools to complete their senior years.

During the Canada leg of my journey, I was reminded of the value in asking yourself what is truly important to teach when designing community-based curricula, and leaving other matters aside to intensively focus on the important things. Nevertheless, while the Chief Atahm School curriculum carefully caters to content of Secwepemc cultural and linguistic significance, this does not at all mean that it disengages from modern curriculum content in an unproductive way. Students still take part in physical education such as swimming, bowling and golf; they still learn music such as keyboard skills; they still utilise up-to-date technology such as iPads; and they still learn about the range of sciences, all the while doing so through their own cultural lens and their own language.

**TEACHING/LEARNING RESOURCES**

As described in the ‘Physical Environment’ section above, the Chief Atahm School and Cséyseten effectively draw on the natural landscape not only as a *site* of learning, but also as an active *source* of learning. So too does the Chief Atahm team honour an Elders-as-teaching/learning-resources approach,

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70 Reference: First Peoples’ Cultural Council (2014) *Language Nest Handbook for B.C. First Nations Communities*, FPCC, Brentwood Bay, 

71 The mathematics curriculum is largely a translated adaptation of the Saxon Maths program, which is also popular within home schooling environments.
respecting the invaluable linguistic-cultural knowledges that Elders can embody and enact in their everyday manner of being, communicating and relating. Through initiatives such as the Connecting Stories Research Project, an active archive of Elders’ knowledges is also maintained, providing a pathway for accessing these knowledges in instances where the physical presence of Elders is not always possible.

Additionally, creating basic cardboard big books, sometimes with laminated illustrations by the children, has been a simple yet effective strategy for sharing language through storytelling. Over the years, the Chief Atahm School has also produced a more professionally published suite of storybooks, flashcards, bingo sets, and TPR teachers’ guides, template/English versions of which are available for purchase at a nominal fee, and which can subsequently be translated into other First Languages across Canada. Generally speaking, the internal approach is to present children only with resources produced in full Secwepemcts’in, not only to facilitate full immersion, but also because English translations tend to feel inadequate when it comes to articulating the cultural concepts embedded in, and evoked through, the language. Investing in desktop printing/publishing technology has helped the Chief Atahm team to be able to minimise reliance on external publishing companies and coordinate resource creation in a more self-sustainable, in-house manner.

Engaging and collaborating with external learning/teaching resource producers can of course still be of great value. As an exemplar, both the Chief Atahm School and the First Peoples’ Cultural Council are affiliated with the FirstVoices initiative – an internationally recognised resource which provides opportunities for technologically savvy youth to work with Elders to populate their own online community portal with audio-visually accompanied alphabets, dictionaries, words/phrases, songs and stories. FirstVoices community portals can be made publicly available or password-protected, depending on the relevant speaker group’s particular protocols and preferences. The portal can also generate a series of interactive games such as word searches, and sets of downloadable labels or flashcards, based on the linguistic content uploaded by community members. A community portal has been established for the Secwepemcts’in language, as well as a diverse range of other First Languages across Canada, and the globe.

The ‘take-home’ message relayed to me during my time in Canada is to focus, first and foremost, on what resources staff within one’s own Language Nest environment assert they most need in order to best facilitate immersion-based and curriculum-aligned teaching. If there is then an opportunity (and capacity) to give that resource a wider, multi-purposeful significance for the children and community at large, acting on that opportunity can become a worthwhile ‘next step’ strategy.

**ENROLMENT/ATTENDANCE**

Arguably, part of the sustained success of the Chief Atahm School’s Cséyseten can be attributed to keeping enrolment numbers within a fairly conservative quota. This Language Nest exemplar focuses on concentrating quality time and attention on a capped participant group, rather than on attracting a potentially unmanageable or unproductive number of enrolments. The highest number of enrolments at any one time has been eleven children, but the total generally tends to sit closer to around seven or eight children. Each year, accepted enrolment numbers are determined by factors such as the number of staff available, the prospective ages of attendees, and whether or not any children in attendance have any special needs. Enrolment tends to be deliberately staggered at the start of the school year, providing an opportunity to first test what size of cohort would be manageable, and then invite additional attendees if feasible.

72 Here, ‘curriculum’ refers primarily to the particular, localised curriculum of distinct Language Nest environments, rather than mainstream curricula per se.
Parents can place their child(ren) on an enrolment wait list, and can pay a deposit to the value of the final Language Nest session for the year to better secure their child(ren)’s priority place on the list. Parents will often be informally interviewed by staff before their child is enrolled so as to ensure that they are genuinely committed to providing an immersion-based education pathway for their child(ren) and not simply seeking affordable ‘day care.’

It is generally expected that a child will start their immersion-based schooling at the earliest age unless, on a case-by-case basis, the child’s family can prove that the child has pre-existing SecwepemcTsín language competence and/or is extremely committed to learning to a desirable standard. The Nursery teacher at the Chief Atahm School explained that those children who entered the Chief Atahm School after first attending the Cséyseten program at an early age certainly tend to show stronger school readiness and more rapid language development results.

Most classes within the Chief Atahm School are composite in nature, and it is not uncommon to give students the opportunity to spend time engaging in shared learning across neighbouring classrooms too. Depending on the number of student enrolments, the Chief Atahm School runs classes right up until the end of Grade 10, after which students can complete their final two senior secondary years within the public school system. Again, having the opportunity to hear ex-Chief Atahm School students express that they even found English classes ‘too easy’ upon transitioning into the senior public school system was highly encouraging.

Outside of the Chief Atahm School and Cséyseten, enrolment criteria and conventions can vary between diverse British Columbian and wider Canadian Language Nests. Other than more obvious questions such as capacity, one key consideration is whether enrolment opportunities are to be extended to students without government-registered ‘Indian’ status. For example, should a (pre)school choose to pursue a funding partnership with a provincial educational jurisdiction, so as to attract non-Indigenous students, this may have implications such as instating a mandatory requirement to roll out standardised testing for all students. Balancing these kinds of considerations without compromising on key linguistic-cultural protocols, priorities and prerogatives thereby becomes important.

**PARENT/FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

The vitality of engaging parents, families and wider community members to establishing and sustainably extending Language Nest initiatives should not be underestimated. Indeed, as mentioned, it was through a small but dedicated group of parents that the Secwepemc Ka Language Nest started, and the Chief Atahm School was subsequently able to evolve. The School’s name – Chief Atahm – was in fact inspired by a figure who had ancestral links to three local bands, thereby symbolically reinforcing the value of strong family relationships in fostering language education and revitalisation. To this day, parents have a number of opportunities to take part in Chief Atahm School and Cséyseten activities, whether by filling a teaching position, sitting in on their children’s learning sessions, attending regular parent meetings, or holding active representative roles on the management committee. They are of course also encouraged to support children’s language learning in the home so as to give the best chance of guaranteeing a new generation of SecwepemcTsín speakers.

To avoid a situation where the School and Cséyseten represent the sole places of child exposure to SecwepemcTsín, and to strengthen capacity for the provision of complementary home-based language learning experiences, Chief Atahm School runs regular community language classes for parents and other adults from the local area. The School is additionally working towards setting up a multimedia room for community members to be able to access, and learn from, Elders’ stories and wider language

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73 Each school year is made up of multiple Language Nest sessions, each of which is about two months in duration. Currently, the Language Nest program operates three full days a week while in session.
materials. Furthermore, it is committed to hosting an annual School community get-together for the purpose of revisiting its vision and core principles, and considering how these can continue to be best reflected across all program areas.

In its Language Nest Handbook for B.C. First Nations Communities, developed with the support of the Chief Atahm School, the First Peoples’ Cultural Council reminds readers of two common and interconnected sayings: ‘it takes a family to save a language,’ and ‘it takes a community to raise a child.’ Both within and outside of Language Nest environments, the role of families and wider community members in supporting not only children’s First Language skill development, but also the more holistic child development that comes with it, is of fundamental value.

**COSTS/FUNDING**

The (federal) Government of Canada, through its Aboriginal Languages Initiative, currently invests approximately five million dollars annually to promote, preserve and perpetuate First Languages across the country. A portion of this funding is channelled into bodies such as the First Peoples’ Cultural Council to appropriately administer at the provincial scale. The great diversity of First Languages even at the more localised, provincial scale does make it challenging to fairly distribute funds across diverse language groups, all the while allocating sufficient funds for a given group to deliver quality outcomes.

Through a specific Language Nest Program stream, the First Peoples’ Cultural Council tends to allocate funding to about eight to ten Language Nests in the province of British Columbia each year. This funding currently comes in the form of a ten to twenty-five-thousand-dollar grant, subject to the recipient organisation/group demonstrating its program’s feasibility and accountability through a twenty-five percent cash contribution. To cover total operational costs, many Language Nests will also require supplementary funding to be sought through other sources. There are, in general, very few consistent funding streams available for Language Nest-style initiatives, so finding new and ongoing funding is often a recurring challenge to be addressed. Developing partnerships with Universities can act as an appropriate avenue for accessing multi-year funding, all the while providing a path for program evaluation, and strengthening, in turn. Strategically seeking out funding opportunities that are not language-specific, but still relevant to a Language Nest’s wider work, can also be of value. For example, turning to environment-oriented grants to install solar panels on educational buildings can not only help to reduce energy costs associated with Language Nest operations but, for cases such as the Chief Atahm School/Cséyseten, can also reinforce core linguistic-cultural values around environmental sustainability as per their embedment in curricula.

Parents who enrol their children in Language Nest programs that operate outside of mainstream/provincial early childhood education jurisdictions are not typically eligible for government childcare subsidies, for which reason there is a general imperative to keep enrolment fees to an affordable minimum. Parent involvement in Language Nest fundraising initiatives can be a way of actively ‘giving back’ to the Nest where formal fee schedules are otherwise low, however.

As children reach school age, access to funding is somewhat more feasible even for on-reserve language education/revitalisation programs. For example, the Chief Atahm School receives nominal per-child funds from the (federal) Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and based on a tripartite agreement with the federal and provincial governments. While such funding may only be baseline in nature, providing for the more immediate necessities such as wages for teaching staff, it nevertheless

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serves as an adequate starting point, upon which additional sources of funding for further needs and initiatives of significance can be sought.

Above all, however, attracting funding should not come at the cost of core linguistic-cultural priorities. I was made well aware, in Canada, of the cruciality of avoiding trade-off scenarios wherein the contractual requirements of funding partners restrict or distort capacity to deliver culturally responsive language education to its fullest revitalising potential.

**ASSESSMENT**

Those Language Nest programs that opt in\(^{75}\) to being licenced under the Ministry of Children and Families are assigned a licencing officer who will work with staff to examine whether, and ensure that, all government licencing requirements pertaining to educator certification, health and safety, and program standards are consistently upheld. Even for those Language Nests which have (legally) forgone formal licencing, there is still an internally and externally upheld expectation that the quality of health, safety and education provided is at least on par with the mainstream/public education system.

Within the Chief Atahm School’s Cséysten program, simple but astute observation, and creating authentic opportunities to elicit child responses/language output, represents an organic way of monitoring language acquisition progress among program participants. Across the Chief Atahm School more broadly, student assessments and report cards are based around the five core principles of *kweslkttnéws, knucwectsút.s, melléléc, slexléxs,* and *qweqwetsín,* and the linguistic-culturally informed knowledges and behaviours expected to fall under these. Student participation in standardised testing such as Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) testing is not compulsory\(^{76}\), although a First Nation immersion school can still choose to take part in this testing. The First Nations Schools Association also offers non-mandatory assessments of member schools, with assessments taking place every five years. These assessments involve quite a comprehensive and intensive process, including multi-day site visits and strong investigations into record-keeping and student performance.

More often than not, it is the long-term educational trajectory of immersion students that provides the clearest proof of a Language Nest program’s success. For example, being able to now see a generation of socially and emotionally strong students who have moved through the Chief Atahm Cséysten and School system to then comfortably and confidently complete their senior secondary years in the public system and ultimately enter into tertiary studies, is an inspiring feat.

**POST-PRESCHOOL LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

In looking at the Secwepemc example specifically, and as already described in previous sections of this Report, there are a couple of key avenues for post-preschool Secwepemcsín skill development beyond the Cséysten environment alone: continued immersion-based learning (currently up to Grade 10) at the Chief Atahm School\(^{77}\), participation in Chief Atahm School community classes, and self-directed learning through resources such as the FirstVoices online community portal. Some tertiary institutions, such as Thompson Rivers University are now also offering basic Secwepemcsín courses/classes, whether to internal faculty staff or as a student elective.

Given the diversity and critically endangered status of many First Languages across the country, these kinds of post-preschool learning opportunities are not immediately available for all First Languages in

\(^{75}\) (whether for reasons of supporting parents to be eligible for government childcare subsidies; obtaining operational funding through the provincial government; ensuring quality and safety standards, and informing practice accordingly; or other reasons altogether)

\(^{76}\) (at least not in the absence of non-Indian-status attendees enrolled at an on-reserve, First Nation school)

\(^{77}\) School-based Secwepemcsín learning also takes place at the Sk'elep School of Excellence in Kamloops, albeit not in full immersion form.
Canada. Where they are available, however, they are certainly valuable to supporting successive – and successful – language revitalisation pathways.

**RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING/RESOURCES**

Nesting Native Languages in Australia: A Miriwoong Example

It is important to appreciate the current state of Language Nests in Australia in order to understand how communities may best be able to draw on insights and inspiration from overseas. In taking a summarised look at the Miriwoong example, it is equally important to appreciate that this case study is not intended to represent a prescriptive application of the Language Nest model for communities across the country. Rather, it merely represents an active illustration of what can be possible for Australia, with distinct linguistic-cultural communities nonetheless encouraged to adopt, adapt and add to (or indeed discard) particular design/implementation features as they each see fit.

BRIEF BACKGROUND

For tens of thousands of years prior to colonisation, more than two hundred and fifty distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages were spoken in Australia. However, due to unjust colonial policies and practices, such as explicit condemnation of native language use, and forced separation of children from their families and speaker communities, many of Australia’s First Languages are currently critically endangered or ‘sleeping.’ Indeed, the most recent (2014) National Indigenous Languages Survey (NILS) report estimated that only around one hundred and twenty First Languages are still spoken in Australia, with only about thirteen of these considered ‘strong.’ At the same time, the report did recognise that, of the approximately one hundred languages in the ‘critically endangered’ category, about thirty or more are seeing significant increases in use levels as a result of language revitalisation programs. Two years prior to the 2014 NILS report, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs released its landmark Our Land Our Languages: Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities report. This report highlighted the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and cultural programs to fostering children’s “increased self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved school attendance, reduced drop-out rates, and better proficiency in ready skills in both the Indigenous language and English” and specifically recommended that Language Nest programs be made a priority for Australia. Having realised the efficacy of immersion-based language learning through a pre-existing Master-Apprentice initiative for adults, and recognising that children’s brains are in fact even more receptive and responsive to this kind of learning, the Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gurring Language and Culture Centre in Kununurra, Western Australia, began piloting a Miriwoong Language Nest-style program in 2013, ready for formal roll-out at the beginning of the 2014 school year. At the time of applying for my Churchill Fellowship, more than three hundred children in and around the Kununurra area were engaging with the Miriwoong Language Nest program on a

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78 Other applications to date include the five (Bundjalung; Gumbaynggirr; North-West Wiradjuri; Paakantji/Baarkintji; and Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay) government-piloted Language and Culture Nests in New South Wales, as well as former programs such as the Bunuba, Gooniyandi and Gija Language Nests in the Kimberley region. Note that members of the Gija community have not recently begun working to revive a Language Nest initiative, following a visit to the Miriwoong Language Nest program in 2016.

79 It is important to emphasise that these are distinct languages, accompanied by an even greater number of traditional dialects, as well as a number of emerging dialects (such as Aboriginal English) and creole languages (such as Kriol) since colonial contact.


regular basis, with this number growing to even more than four hundred by the time I boarded my first Fellowship flight.

**POLITICO-LEGAL CONTEXT**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their languages have faced great injustices through colonial policies and practices of assimilation. It is important to acknowledge that, while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have shown significant resilience in the face of these injustices, government politico-legal attempts at addressing or ameliorating them are only very recent, and arguably very incomplete. For example, it was only fifty years ago that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples actually began being counted as ‘people’ in the national census, and less than ten years ago that the Prime Minister of Australia formally apologised to the many members of the Stolen Generations who, right up until the 1970s, were forcibly removed from their families and speaker communities by colonial authorities.

At the Commonwealth scale, the evolution of politico-legal initiatives with potential to support First Languages revitalisation has included:

- the introduction of the first National Policy on Languages, 1987;
- the release of *Australia’s Language: The Australian Language and Literacy Policy* as a white paper in 1991;
- the tabling of the *Language and Culture – A Matter of Survival* report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in 1992, following its inquiry into the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages;
- the announcement of Indigenous Languages – A National Approach as a national Indigenous languages policy in 2009, in response to the findings of the first (2005) commissioned NILS report;
- the dissemination of the *Our Land Our Languages: Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities* report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in 2012.

At the Australian state/territory level, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages policies tend to be embedded within wider policies (such as those pertaining to education), rather than operate on a stand-alone basis. There are exceptions, however, such as the New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Policy, which was first introduced in 2004. Within the period of writing this Fellowship Report, New South Wales has also ushered a historic legislative development into State Parliament – the Aboriginal Languages Bill. Amidst a series of Acknowledgement statements highlighting the intrinsic value of Aboriginal Languages, Aboriginal peoples’ rights to learn these languages, and role of government in appropriately recognising and protecting these languages, this Bill calls for the preparation of a strategic plan to promote language survival and revival, alongside a commitment to establishing a coordinated Centre for Aboriginal Languages of New South Wales.\(^{83}\) While the Bill has a great degree of immediate symbolic potency, the arguable challenge moving forward is to foster self-determination through the legislation, ensuring appropriate infrastructure/resourcing for community-led language revitalisation projects, rather than imposing ministerial management over these.

A further politico-legal factor for consideration, not only in Australia but indeed on a shared, international basis, is the way in which the protection and promotion of First Languages is enshrined in human rights declarations. For example, Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights entitles all people to all rights and freedoms, without distinctions of any kind, including language.\(^{84}\) Combined,

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Articles 13 and 14 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples additionally state that Indigenous peoples “have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their...languages,” as well as “the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of learning and teaching.” Australia was one of just four countries to have voted against this Declaration when it was first introduced in 2007 however, in 2009, the Federal Government changed its position and moved to formally endorse the Declaration, appreciating its place in advancing the linguistic and wider rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Finally, while it is not my place or intention to attempt to explain the Dreaming from a non-Indigenous perspective, it is nonetheless imperative to point out that, for Aboriginal communities across Australia, it is commonly considered vital for language use, and teachings, to continue to be carried out in accordance with Dreaming laws. Actively acknowledging the place of linguistic-cultural knowledge and protocols tied to the Dreaming is integral to understanding the politico-legal context of, and to appropriately planning for, First Languages revitalisation projects in Australia.

GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES/SUPPORT

Established in 1991, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring Language and Culture Centre, through which the Miriwoong Language Nest program is run, represents the operational arm of Mirima Council Aboriginal Corporation, a public benevolent institution which was first formally incorporated in 1986. All internal (and indeed many external) matters pertaining to Kununurra’s local Miriwoong and neighbouring Gajirrabeng language are to be based on active consultation with the Mirima Council, which is comprised of respected Elders and senior speakers, each holding a Chair, Vice-Chair or Director role. Mirima Council is able to provide core, culturally-informed direction and decision-making around language revitalisation initiatives, drawing attention to distinct protocols that should underlie these. Directors have themselves chosen to take part in regular Directors Meetings without sitting fees, demonstrating that their decision-making is genuinely motivated and otherwise unswayed. While Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring has long employed a respected (non-Indigenous) Manager/Senior Linguist, the person in this position is expected to work in close partnership with the Centre’s governing Council, and ultimately has no formalised ‘vote’ in decision-making processes.

As well as being accountable to the Mirima Council, and to Miriwoong cultural and community priorities more generally, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring’s Miriwoong Language Nest team also maintains a shared, reciprocal sense of accountability to the educational groups/institutions it runs its program with, namely:

- Gawooleng Yawoodeng Pindan Centre
- One Tree (formerly CSSU) Kununurra Early Learning Centre
- Wunan Children and Family Centre playgroup
- Ewin Early Learning Centre
- St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School
- Kununurra District High School

87 Note that this is not at all to suggest that the linguistic-cultural guidance and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is not of inherent value, and not deserving of remuneration.
88 Note that some of these groups, such as the Save the Children East Kimberley Mobile Play Scheme team, have ceased to exist since the earlier days of the Miriwoong Language Nest program, and that others have only emerged/begun engaging with the program in more recent years. Groups currently engaged in Miriwoong Language Nest sessions on at least a weekly basis include Gawooleng Yawoodeng Pindan Centre, One Tree Early Learning Centre, Wunan Children and Family Centre playgroup, Ewin Early Learning Centre, St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School and Kununurra District High School.
The team has also had a representative voice in relevant forums such as the local Communities for Children reference group, and an East Kimberley Early Years Network group. Attending these group meetings has helped Miriwoong language prerogatives to be better heard, and honoured, within wider conversations around providing meaningful educational opportunities for children in the community.

Furthermore, while Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring is recognised as the representative body for local linguistic-cultural matters specifically, it also maintains a dialogue with other representative bodies in the area, such as the Kimberley Land Council and Yawoorroong Miriuwung Gajerrong Yirrgeb Noong Dawang Aboriginal Corporation. Doing so helps to encourage positive inter-institutional collaboration, particularly given the inextricable link between language and matters pertaining to Country/community more broadly.

PHILOSOPHIES, PROTOCOLS AND PEDAGOGIES

Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring translates to mean “Mirima Place for Talking” and the mission of its Language Nest program is to help to ensure that the Miriwoong language survives, and continues to be spoken, for generations to come.

In driving this mission, the Miriwoong Language Nest program works to foster what one could call the ‘three Cs cycle,’ with these three ‘Cs’ being comfort, confidence and competency. That is, if children feel comfortable in their language learning environment, then they are more likely to gain confidence in using the language that they are learning. Similarly, if children feel confident, they are more likely to practice the language and are thus more likely to gain competency in communicating through that language. Comfort generates confidence, which generates competency, and so forth. Therefore, it can be important to initiate the three Cs cycle by focusing on creating a comfortable language learning context. Rather than strictly or explicitly teaching and correcting children (which can be intimidating), children should simply be surrounded by fun and friendly language activities so that, through listening, repetition and experimentation, they will gradually (even if only subconsciously, at first) gain a feel for the right rules and workings of the language.

While the Miriwoong Language Nest program does not currently operate as a full-day immersion preschool, it reaches children across a range of pre-existing (pre)school environments through the mobile delivery of regular (daily or weekly) immersion sessions. Each session is approximately twenty to thirty minutes in length, and is generally structured by a sequence of simple talk, storytelling, song, game and sometimes art/craft activities. A typical Miriwoong Language Nest session would be likely to include:

1. An opening Woorlab Yarrenkoo Miriwoong (‘Let’s all speak Miriwoong’) song, to signal the start of the immersion session to children and settle them in, as a group.
2. An introduction to the core vocabulary that the group is focusing on at the time, through simple talk or storytelling. The idea here is to provide opportunities for children to identify core vocabulary items within a range of different sentence structures and in the context of wider grammar. Children may first be prompted to simply repeat the core vocabulary items but, as they move through the curriculum, will be gradually guided to respond to more complex questions concerning those vocabulary items, with minimal prompting required.

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89 Communities for Children is a funding initiative offered through the Australian Government Department of Social Services.
90 The regularity of session delivery depends on the needs and interests of each participant group, although most groups choose to engage in Miriwoong Language Nest sessions at least once per week.
3. The incorporation of core vocabulary into a song/dance routine.
4. The incorporation of core vocabulary into one or more comprehension games or activities.
5. A repeat singing of the *Woorlab Yarrenkoo Miriwoong* song to conclude the session.

Drawing on a predictable sequence of activities supports children to effectively engage in the immersion-based language learning environment. That is, it allows them to focus on the core vocabulary explored in a Miriwoong Language Nest session, rather than risk getting lost in lengthy explanations about what is about to happen in a session, how, and why. Despite their structural predictability, however, Miriwoong Language Nest sessions are otherwise dynamic and high-energy in nature, designed to be motivating and not mundane. They are also designed to be heavily group-based, reinforcing the importance of collective action, momentum and strength in language revitalisation processes.91

Visual prompts such as picture cards, puppets and gestures are often useful pedagogical tools in facilitating Miriwoong Language Nest sessions. At the same time, as children move though each unit of the Miriwoong Language Nest curriculum, the aim is to gradually reduce the amount of prompting incorporated into session activities. Doing so helps to subtly test the extent of children’s comprehension, and to ensure that comprehension and reproduction skills alike are progressing without an over-reliance on prompting.

One thing which *is* consistently relied on is an attention to Miriwoong cultural protocols. That is, as is the case for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, there are a number of distinct protocols around who has appropriate authority to teach/learn the Miriwoong language, and with whom, where, when and how. These include protocols around language items that *cannot* always be shared. To give just one example, according to cultural respect protocols, a Miriwoong person would not pronounce the names of certain in-laws or siblings of the opposite sex, nor the names of recently deceased family/community members. Words closely resembling these names would similarly be avoided. While the complex range of Miriwoong cultural protocols cannot be fully detailed within the confines of this Report, some are further alluded to in the short descriptive sections below, given that they essentially permeate all aspects of the Miriwoong Language Nest program’s design and delivery. It is only through a careful and consistent attention to local cultural protocols that the Miriwoong Language Nest program can be the most respectful, relevant and responsive in nature.

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The Miriwoong Language Nest program operates according to what one might describe as a kind of ‘mobile Language Nest’ approach. That is, as outlined above, the program delivers regular Miriwoong immersion sessions to children in pre-existing (pre)school environments in and around the Kununurra area. These environments range from remote community playgroups and school readiness program settings; early learning and child care centres; and Pre-primary to Year 3 classrooms at the local public and Catholic schools alike. Maintaining this mobile approach allows the Miriwoong Language Nest team to go out to where large groups of children are already gathered, in locations that are already appropriately licenced.

The program’s mobility is limited to places and spaces within Miriwoong Country – a geo-culturally defined tract of land that covers a wide area in Western Australia’s East Kimberley region, extending into parts of the Northern Territory. Although only established as a township in the early 1960s, Kununurra92 is at the heart of Miriwoong Country, and is at the heart of the Miriwoong Language Nest program’s operations. The imperative to exclusively host Miriwoong Language Nest sessions on

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91 (all the while reducing the risk of ‘shaming’ individual students by singling them out)
92 The toponym, Kununurra, is indeed believed to have been derived from the Miriwoong locative noun, Goonoonoorram (‘place of the river’; in/at the river).
Miriwoong Country honours what, from a local Aboriginal perspective, is understood to be an intricate and inseparable interrelationship between Miriwoong language, culture and Country.93 It is also based on a parallel respect for those First Languages belonging to other geo-cultural communities, recognising that, when walking onto another community’s land, it is most appropriate to be talking that community’s language.

While some Miriwoong Language Nest sessions will take place outdoors, providing clear opportunities for children to connect with language and Country simultaneously, many take place in quiet classroom spaces that are also conducive to learning. Typically, in preparation for the commencement of a Miriwoong Language Nest session, children will assemble on a shared space such as a mat, or otherwise gather together in an appropriate group configuration94, such as a circle. Doing so helps to signal to children that a Miriwoong immersion session is about to start, and symbolically reinforces the importance of working together to strengthen Miriwoong language skills. It can also serve as an implicit reminder of the importance of setting aside designated time and space for Miriwoong language learning as part of a group’s collective dedication to the language revitalisation process.

STAFFING, EMPLOYEE QUALIFICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Core members of the Miriwoong Language Nest team include a small pool of (3-5) Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers, alongside a Language Nest Facilitator.

The Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers are local Miriwoong women95 who are committed to their own ongoing Miriwoong language development, and have a keen interest in teaching language to young children. The Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers work together with the support of the Language Nest Facilitator, and under the guidance of Elders and senior speakers, to produce culturally responsive lesson plans and learning/teaching resources, and to ultimately deliver Miriwoong Language Nest sessions to the children. Over the years, they have actively engaged in the following kinds of professional development opportunities:

- Weekly Master-Apprentice style sessions with Miriwoong Elders and senior speakers. These sessions allow the Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers to participate in their own immersion-based learning, and to present questions and new curriculum content to Elders for review.
- Regular internal workshops to develop strategies for creating a continuing ‘illusion of fluency’ in the context of individual Miriwoong Language Nest sessions. As Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers may not be fully fluent speakers, developing skills in the use of core ‘survival phrases,’ as well as non-verbal language, supports them to maintain a full-immersion environment without reverting to English, even at moments where the most appropriate Miriwoong expression may not immediately come to mind.
- Completion of a Certificate III in Aboriginal Languages for Communities and Workplaces96 and participation in wider Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages (DRIL) training workshops, offered through the Resource Network for Linguistic Diversity (RNLD).
- Internationally-sourced training in immersion-based language learning and teaching methodologies, delivered through the Indigenous Languages Institute (ILI).

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93 It is for this reason that I have also minimised the use of Miriwoong language content in context of this Report – reinforcing the idea that the Miriwoong language belongs on Miriwoong Country, rather than within a ‘placeless,’ online space.
94 Despite the general, spatialised focus on coming together for collective learning, culturally informed avoidance protocols – such as avoiding eye contact, or facing one’s back to, an in-law of the opposite gender – are also respectfully played out in the physical environments and group configurations within which Miriwoong Language Nest sessions take place.
95 As, culturally, caring for children’s linguistic and wider development is understood to be predominantly the domain of women, the Language Engagement Officer role has only been filled by women, to date.
96 Staff at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring were indeed among the first cohort to complete this new qualification, in 2016.
One Miriwoong Language Engagement Officer has also gone on to pursue a Preparation for Tertiary Success program offered through Batchelor Institute, with a dream of later enrolling into tertiary-level linguistics studies. Another has been accepted into the Western Australian Department of Education’s Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training program which provides a pathway for her to, upon graduating, apply to the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia for a Limited Registration to Teach (LRT). This pathway may play an important part in succession planning for the Miriwoong Language Nest initiative as it will allow at least one Miriwoong Language Engagement Officer to be formally appointed as an Aboriginal language teacher at a school, and remunerated accordingly.

The Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers have chosen to be employed on a part-time basis, providing time in their schedule to tend to other cultural and familial priorities. Contextualised leave allowances, such as cultural leave, have also been appropriately written into staff contacts and, based on cultural respect protocols, Miriwoong Language Nest sessions will not operate on occasions such as community funeral days. Recruiting a pool of Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers – and thereby better securing back-up staff when rostered staff are unavailable – has helped to accommodate the range of cultural and familial priorities that any individual Officer may be committed to. It has also helped to accommodate program expansion, opening up the possibility for more than one Miriwoong Language Nest session to be run simultaneously.

The Language Nest Facilitator role is focused on collaborating with the Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers to support program design and delivery, as well as on coordinating the administrative, evaluative and stakeholder engagement elements of the Miriwoong Language Nest program. It is generally expected that the Language Nest Facilitator holds a tertiary qualification, or equivalent experience, in relevant fields such as Education, Linguistics or Community Development. He or she is also expected to commit to ongoing Miriwoong linguistic-cultural learning, under the guidance of Elders and as per the advice of wider Mirima Council members. It is worth noting that all recruitment processes at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring are run past the Mirima Council, members of which can help to advise whether a person is fit for the role, and indeed a fitting role model for the community. To date, the Language Nest Facilitator role has been filled by a non-Indigenous member of staff. While, alongside the practical or logistical support of the Language Nest Facilitator role, it has been agreed that there is great symbolic efficacy in having a non-Indigenous member of the Miriwoong Language Nest team (in terms of modelling positive intercultural relationships and collaboration, and in demonstrating shared pride in Indigenous Australian identities, cultures and contributions), non-Indigenous Facilitators would nevertheless refrain from any direct Miriwoong teaching in the absence of Miriwoong co-workers.

Outside of the immediate Miriwoong Language Nest team, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring is further staffed by a Manager/Senior Linguist; a Project Linguist; an Administrative/Accounts Assistant; Miriwoong Elders and linguistic-cultural Consultants; and a team of six Miriwoong Language Workers, whose work focuses on language documentation and wider resource development, as well as the running of radio programs and public/adult language classes. All staff maintain a close working relationship, and could indeed be described as a positive ‘workplace family.’ Visiting volunteers, interns and secondees have also been commonly hosted by Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring in recent years, and have exchanged strong professional experiences and personal relationships with the team.

Furthermore, it is ultimately worth mentioning that, in a local context where unemployment and staff turnover are relatively high, many members of the Miriwoong Language Nest and wider Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring team have held their positions for a number of years – dedicated to what is, after all, a lifelong process of language revitalisation.
Each unit within the Miriwoong Language Nest curriculum has been predominantly shaped by a semantic domain of cultural significance, coupled with one or more relevant grammatical foci that lend themselves to sequential learning. For example, while it works well to explore grammatical gender in a unit about ‘people,’ a unit about significant sites on Miriwoong Country is perhaps best coupled with a grammatical focus on locatives and directionals.

Established units within the Miriwoong Language Nest curriculum include:

- People (of different ages/stages of the life cycle)
- Body Parts
- Weather and Seasons
- Animals
- Feelings and Emotions
- Food
- Places on Miriwoong Country

Units on Miriwoong tools/instruments, family, trees, insects and bird life are also being developed and piloted. Before being brought to the classroom, new curriculum content is presented to Elders and senior speakers for review, with the aim of ensuring linguistic accuracy and cultural appropriateness alike.

Each unit is of course taught through Miriwoong immersion, and through a corresponding Miriwoong linguistic-cultural lens. To give an example, the Weather and Seasons unit focuses on the three distinct seasons (warnka-mageny (cold season), bardenyiriny (hot season) and nyinggiyi-mageny (wet season)) of the Miriwoong seasonal calendar, rather than on the four seasons described in ‘Western’ culture.

The speed at which children move through the curriculum can depend on the age of the participant group concerned, and on the regularity of sessions received by that group. Generally speaking, about one school term would be dedicated to exploring one unit, based on the assumption that the group is participating in Miriwoong Language Nest sessions at least once a week. As the Miriwoong Language Nest program is continuing to expand, and participants are continuing to learn at such as positive rate, the team at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring is currently drafting a more elaborate curriculum scope and sequence, with a vision to at least consider what an extended (preschool–high school) learning trajectory might entail.

While the Miriwoong Language Nest program has, to date, operated independently of mainstream curriculum frameworks, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority’s recent release of the Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages provides another possible platform for succession planning. That is, while purposefully broad and baseline, the Framework represents the first national curriculum document to present recognised pathways for Indigenous languages learning right through from Foundation Year to Year 10. More generally, the Australian Curriculum’s mandated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority sets a requirement for teaching about the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions (of which languages are an integral part) to be embedded across all subject/learning areas. At the preschool level, the Early Years Learning

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Framework similarly calls for a respect for, and responsiveness to, diversity, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic-cultural diversity. While First Languages have long been marginalised from mainstream curricula, it is thus encouraging to see curriculum authorities making stronger steps to recognise and respect First Languages in the spirit of reconciliation.

TEACHING/LEARNING RESOURCES

The Miriwoong Language Nest team, together with the wider staffing team at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring, has worked to produce a number of Miriwoong-specific teaching/learning resources over the years. Many of these resources are able to be effectively drawn on in facilitating Miriwoong Language Nest sessions, and many are further able to be used to support language learning in the home and wider community contexts. Examples include:

- A Miriwoong public dictionary.
- Digitised audio-visual footage, and newly developed short films.
- Recorded community radio programs, such as a Miriwoong ‘Word of the Week’ and ‘Song of the Month’ series, broadcast in collaboration with Waringarri Radio.
- An interactive online Miriwoong seasonal calendar resource, shared with the Australia Bureau of Meteorology.
- A Miriwoong smartphone app.
- A suite of bilingual (Miriwoong/English) audio books. Each of these are compatible with an audio reader pen technology, allowing readers to listen to accurate Miriwoong pronunciations of the text that they are reading. Generally speaking, resources that contain an accompanying audio component are considered of critical importance to the team at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring, given that the Miriwoong phonetic system is quite distinct to the English system. Misreading and mispronunciation risks disrespecting, and further damaging, the already critically endangered Miriwoong language.

To support Miriwoong Language Nest participants to see themselves positively reflected in their learning, and to provide them with a meaningful sense of ownership and empowerment over their learning, the Miriwoong Language Nest team has directly involved child participants in the production of two professionally published audio books:

- Yangge Yindajgoo! : a book featuring children’s photography, and focused on Miriwoong interrogatives. This book was premised on an understanding that questions can be great conversation starters – they are great ways to get people talking, and keep people talking, because they always require an answer.
- Gooloo-gooloob Yarroondayan! : a book featuring children’s statements and illustrations about what it is that makes them happy. This publication includes translations of sentences into a more common, realis form, as well as a more complex and less frequently understood/used form involving subordinate clauses and irrealis verbs. Its production also involved a dedicated process of ‘lexicon expansion’ in some instances, where Elders and senior speakers worked to decide on appropriate Miriwoong expressions to translate more ‘Western’ content and concepts that cannot be found in


100 Note that this is not the first dictionary to have been produced for the Miriwoong language. Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring has, internally, been working with a much more comprehensive dictionary for many years now, but this is first dictionary made publicly available, containing select vocabulary that community members wished to share with all people living in the Kununurra area, and that are not secret-sacred or otherwise inappropriate to share publicly, in print form.
the traditional Miriwoong lexicon, but which children are surrounded by in everyday, contemporary life.

Where possible, resource production, publication and distribution costs are typically written into funding contracts, but they can also be valuably supported by small grants. For example, publication of the *Gooloo-gooloo Yarroondayan!* audio book was made possible through the support of a Wyemando Bequest grant. Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring also received a grant, through the Optus Community Grants program, to fully subsidise the distribution of audio reader pens\(^1\) to Miriwoong families and their households.

It is nevertheless important to appreciate that the Miriwoong Language Nest team prioritises quality teaching/learning experiences over costly teaching/learning resources. That is, the team recognises that effective teaching and successful language learning can be facilitated even through the simplest resources, whether basic laminated picture cards, self-gathered native plant/food samples, or even intangible teaching tools such as songs and gestures.

An attention to Miriwoong cultural protocols is strongly played out in both the creation and use of teaching/learning resources. For example, based on cultural respect protocols, generally no images of deceased Miriwoong persons would be incorporated into teaching/learning resources for a period of time after their passing. Similarly, given the group-based nature of Miriwoong Language Nest sessions – involving both male and female and Miriwoong and non-Miriwoong child participants – no culturally gendered or secret-sacred knowledges and materials are shared during session times.\(^2\) To support staff at partnering educational groups/institutions, as well as any people living and working on Miriwoong Country, to develop an appreciation of the linguistic-cultural protocols that are important in building personal or professional relationships with Miriwoong children and community members, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring also runs regular cultural awareness training courses. Teaching, learning and resourcing therefore becomes as much about being responsive to adult stakeholders as it is to the child participants in the Nest program.

**ENROLMENT/ATTENDANCE**

To promote the significance of learning and speaking the Miriwoong language while on Miriwoong Country, participation in the Miriwoong Language Nest program is not exclusive. Aboriginal families from other linguistic-cultural communities who have moved into the township of Kununurra have shared a mutual understanding that, while on Miriwoong Country, their children can show cultural respect, as well as engage in meaningful educational opportunities, by learning the local Miriwoong language. Non-Indigenous parents and families have also consistently expressed their appreciation of the Miriwoong Language Nest program’s benefits in terms of building their children’s cultural competence, and respect for cultural diversity, from a very early age.

As the Miriwoong Language Nest program is not housed within a physical (pre)school environment of its own, any logistical matters pertaining to enrolment and attendance are based on the guidelines and requirements of the partnering educational institutions/groups that Miriwoong Language Nest sessions are delivered to. This does mean that, currently, children’s access to the program is in some ways reliant on Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring maintaining a positive partnership with diverse educational institutions/groups, each of which has the liberty to freely opt into engaging with the Miriwoong Language Nest program but who, in turn, have the responsibility to set aside time in their teaching schedules to accommodate regular Miriwoong Language Nest sessions. It has been incredibly pleasing

\(^{101}\) Note that a single audio reader pen is compatible with each publication across the range of bilingual audio books created by Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring.

\(^{102}\) The sharing of these knowledges/materials, where appropriate, is reserved for Miriwoong cultural life outside of the classroom.
and encouraging to witness these partnerships grow so positively and organically since the Miriwoong Language Nest program’s origins, largely in response to staff at partnering educational institutions/groups, through taking a chance at seeing and experiencing the program in action, soon recognising – and committing to harnessing – its inherent value, clearly perceivable results and believable potential from very early on. As such, The Miriwoong Language Nest team is now faced with the ‘positive dilemma’ of having demand for program engagement almost outweighing capacity. While the program was only ever intended to be focused on children in their preschool years, it was quickly welcomed into the early school years, and has since followed children through into subsequent year levels.

PARENT/FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

It is important to recognise that, according to Miriwoong kinship systems and skin name cycles, each of the Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers effectively represent family members – such as ‘mothers,’ ‘aunties’ and ‘grannies,’ to name just a few relational examples – to all Miriwoong children participating in the Miriwoong Language Nest program. Seeing their family members – many of whom were in many ways marginalised from the mainstream education system during their own (pre)schooling years – in positive teaching positions can be a real source of pride and inspiration for Miriwoong children. Wider family members are generally welcome to ‘drop in’ on Miriwoong Language Nest sessions, and are invited to attend (pre)school concerts featuring performance items that showcase children’s Miriwoong Language Nest learnings.

As well as being able to engage with the publicly and freely available resources produced by Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring (such as the Miriwoong smartphone app and community radio programs, to give just two examples), parents, families and community members are also able to freely subscribe to a regular Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring newsletter to share in positive news stories. To encourage community engagement further, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring does also have an active social media presence, even though careful monitoring of content openly posted online becomes important, from a cultural perspective.

Annual events of cultural and community significance, such as NAIDOC Week, provide an additional platform for Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring to involve parents, families and the community at large in meaningful linguistic-cultural learnings, activities, and celebrations. Indeed, it was highly fitting that this year’s NAIDOC Week theme, Our Languages Matter, was specifically dedicated to emphasising and celebrating the unique and essential role that First Languages play in cultural and community life.

Furthermore, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring has, for a number of years now, run public Miriwoong language classes to involve interested adult learners. These classes are free of charge for Miriwoong community members, and come at a just a nominal fee for wider participants, with any revenue raised reinvested into Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring’s everyday language revitalisation efforts.

Finally, it is also worth pointing out that Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring and its Miriwoong Language Nest team are also very open to exchanging appropriate insights and inspiration with other Aboriginal communities. For example, just last year, the Miriwoong Language Nest team hosted a special visit from a neighbouring group of Gija Elders, as well as Warmun Wanyanyakem Taam Early Learning Centre staff, Warmun Ngalangangpum School-based staff and Purnululu School (Frog Hollow) staff. Inspired by the innovativeness and success of the Miriwoong Language Nest program and driven to preserve the Gija language through similar means, a Gija Language Nest initiative has since begun being piloted.

103 (and indeed Aboriginal child participants from wider linguistic-cultural communities, given that equivalents for each Miriwoong skin name can be found in the skin name systems of almost all other communities)

104 Sometimes, at some partnering educational institutions/groups, the only requirement before attending a session is to follow standard sign-in processes.
following the visit included comments such as “It was so inspiring, exciting and interesting to see the Miriwoong Language Nest team at work. How wonderful that those kids are really learning from such a young age. The Gija Elders and Educators are stoked and fired up to get things going and now have some really concrete ways forward.” Such feedback highlights the value in not only motivating internal community involvement, but also appropriate inter-community sharing and support – a strong rationale behind my Churchill Fellowship endeavours.

**COSTS/FUNDING**

Start-up funding to support the initial piloting, and first formal roll-out year, of the Miriwoong Language Nest program was provided by Lotterywest. This was supplemented with a grant offered through the former Indigenous Languages Support (ILS) program, administered through the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport – Office for the Arts.

In order to sustain and extend the early success of the Miriwoong Language Nest program, sources of funding for Miriwoong Language Nest activities have since been diversified to include: the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS); the Department of Social Service’s Strengthening Communities grant program; and the Department of Social Service’s Communities for Children (CfC) funding initiative, locally administered by Save the Children Australia. The Miriwoong Language Nest program has also recently received some funding support through Yawoorroong Miriuwung Gajerrong Yirrgeb Noong Dawang Aboriginal Corporation.

Applying for, and accessing, funding for First Languages revitalisation projects in Australia tends to be a competitive process, and it can be a challenge to locate ongoing and consistently titled, timed and targeted funding pools or schemes. Nevertheless, so as not to limit program accessibility, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring does not charge partnering educational groups for the delivery of Miriwoong Language Nest sessions. A couple of program partners have, over time, kindly offered once-off financial contributions or nominal fee-for-service donations as a display of their appreciation of the program’s inherent value. As Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring is appropriately registered for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, it does also have potential to seek and strengthen philanthropic funding partnerships into the future so as to support the continuation of Miriwoong Language Nest operations.

**ASSESSMENT**

As the Miriwoong Language Nest program is delivered to pre-exiting educational groups/institutions, rather than representing a formalised (pre)school institution of its own, it is not directly subject to standard early childhood education and care regulatory requirements. However, the presence of the Miriwoong Language Nest program within partnering educational institutions can positively play into those partnering institutions’ assessment ratings. To give just one example, the current assessment guide for element 6.3.4 of the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority’s *National Quality Standard (NQS)*, against which approved early childhood education and care services are evaluated and regulated, currently advocates for “an environment that reflects the lives of the children and families using the service and the cultural diversity of the broader community, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,” which the Miriwoong Language Nest program clearly supports.

Although not directly subject to assessment processes such as NQS-related ratings, the Miriwoong Language Nest program nevertheless undergoes a number of other internal and external evaluation

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105 (other than individual staffing requirements, such as the need to carry a valid Western Australian Working With Children Check)

processes of value, so as to continually strengthen the program with rigour and responsiveness. Alongside culturally informed and critically reflective conversations between Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring staff members, examples of regular internal evaluation processes include:

- Maintenance and analysis of a daily track record featuring data such as the date on which a Miriwoong Language Nest session was delivered; the partnering educational group/institution with which the session was delivered; the number of children engaged in the session; which Miriwoong Language Engagement Officers delivered the session; the particular curriculum content/unit focused on in the session; which individual language teaching/learning activities were carried out during the session; and any observational evidence of language learning progress demonstrated by children within the session.

- Collation and analysis of (anonymised) quarterly surveys distributed to, and completed by, staff at partnering educational institutions/groups. With each survey question accommodating additional space for commentary, the types of questions incorporated into these surveys include:
  - Outside of the Miriwoong Language Nest program, are the children at your (pre)school service receiving any other Miriwoong language education during the hours spent in your care?
  - Do you think that the Miriwoong Language Nest sessions delivered to children at your (pre)school service has increased these children’s knowledge/use of the Miriwoong language, and why?
  - Do you think that it is important for the children in your care to be learning Miriwoong, and why?
  - Do you think that the children in your care have enjoyed learning Miriwoong through the Miriwoong Language Nest program, and why?
  - Do you believe that the thematic content of Miriwoong Language Nest sessions has been relevant and meaningful for the children in your care, and why?
  - Do you believe that the Miriwoong Language Nest team have used effective language teaching methodologies, and why?
  - Do you believe that the Miriwoong Language Nest team have used effective language teaching resources, and why?
  - Do you feel that Miriwoong Language Nest sessions are appropriately, sensitively and successfully tailored to vulnerable or ‘at risk’ students, and why?
  - Do you feel that the Miriwoong Language Nest program supports your educational institution/group in understanding and building some of the relevant knowledge, skills, activities and networks to respond to the needs of the children in your care (and, where relevant, their wider families and community), and why?
  - Do you feel that the Miriwoong Language Nest program helps to support school readiness for the children in your care, and why?
  - Which of the Early Years Learning Framework outcomes (children have a strong sense of identity; children are connected with and contribute to their world; children have a strong sense of wellbeing; children are confident and involved learners; children are effective communicators) do you believe the Miriwoong Language Nest program helps to support, and why?
  - Do you have any further feedback regarding the Miriwoong Language Nest program (whether positive praise, constructive criticism or suggestions for the future of the program)?

- Analysis of quarterly focus group surveys carried out with school-aged Miriwoong Language Nest child participants, coordinated by the Miriwoong Language Nest team or by staff at Kununurra’s two local schools. Examples of prompt questions drawn on during these focus groups include:
  - Do you think that your time with the Miriwoong Language Nest team has helped you to understand Miriwoong better? Why?
  - Do you think that your time with the Miriwoong Language Nest team has helped you to speak Miriwoong better? Why?
- Do you ever practice speaking Miriwoong at times when the Miriwoong Language Nest team are not present (e.g. at home or in the playground?)
- Do you enjoy learning Miriwoong with the Miriwoong Language Nest team? Why?
- Do you think it is important to learn Miriwoong? What other topics would you like to learn about in Miriwoong?
- Are you happy with the topics that the Miriwoong Language Nest team have taught you? Why?
- How does learning Miriwoong make you feel? Why?
- Is there anything else that you would like to say about the time that you spend learning with the Miriwoong Language Nest team?

- Maintenance and analysis of a track record of anecdotal evidence received from Miriwoong Language Nest child participants, staff at partnering educational institutions/groups, parents, and wider community members.

In addition to such internal evaluation processes, external evaluation processes regarding the Miriwoong Language Nest program, and Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring as an organisation more widely, have included:

- In-person visits from funding partners, and review of regularly submitted funding/KPI reports.
- An independent program evaluation, carried out by Kimberley Boab Consulting.
- Assessment and allocation of a ‘Promising’ Evidence-based Programme rating by the Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Participation in regional and national awards programs, such as having been recognised as a Finalist in the WA Regional Achievement and Community Awards, and the National Winner in the HESTA Community Sector Organisation of the Year Awards.

In all, albeit operating in a context with many identified challenges, such as high socio-economic disadvantage, and of course the critically endangered status of the Miriwoong language, the Miriwoong Language Nest program has in many ways exceeded expectations and has consistently received overwhelmingly positive feedback. While continued, critical evaluation has been equally important, such positive reinforcement has been undoubtedly integral to maintaining morale and momentum behind the program’s language revitalisation efforts.

**POST-PRESCHOOL LANGUAGE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

As mentioned in the ‘Enrolment/Attendance’ section above, while the Miriwoong Language Nest program was initially established to engage children in their preschool years specifically, the program has expanded so as to follow children into their early school years. As such, the program currently engages children up until the Year 3 school level, with aspirations for ongoing expansion.

Outside of the Miriwoong Language Nest program, and beyond the early years learning context, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring fosters the following additional avenues for Miriwoong language learning:

- Limited, self-directed learning through a range of Miriwoong-specific resources (as described in the ‘Teaching/Learning Resources’ section above);
- Regular whole-group Master-Apprentice Language Learning sessions;
- Public Miriwoong language classes for adult learners;
- Tailored Miriwoong language learning sessions for groups such as the local MG Rangers, and participants of the Indigenous ranger program run through Yeehaa riding school. As of this year, the Miriwoong Language Workers at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring have also been hosting regular language classes for the male students involved in the East Kimberley Clontarf Academy program, as well as a Year 5/6 Class from Kununurra District High School.
Most of the above language learning opportunities are not necessarily delivered through an immersion-based approach, but they nevertheless provide meaningful avenues for Miriwoong language learning beyond the Miriwoong Language Nest program alone.

In thinking about the future of Miriwoong language learning possibilities, it is encouraging to know that, in other parts of Australia, Aboriginal Languages has recently become offered as a Higher School Certificate subject, and even more encouraging to know of some languages (such as Arrernte, Gamilaraay, Kaurna, Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, Wiradjuri, and Yolŋu Matha) being offered as subjects and/or graduate certificate courses at the tertiary level.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING/RESOURCES


- Mills, V. (2014) ‘They’re just so proud to see their grandchildren learning their language,’ *ABC WA*, <https://soundcloud.com/abcwa/theyre-just-so-proud-to-see-their-grandchildren-learning-their-language>


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107 Note, however, that while the Aboriginal Languages HSC VET courses count as BOSTES-endorsed unit credit for the Higher School Certificate, they do not contribute towards an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).


CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

My Churchill Fellowship experience provided me with the invaluable opportunity to learn what is possible for Language Nest-style programs, and what incredible results are possible through them, at the (inter)national scale. I am sure it therefore comes as no surprise that my first recommendation is a recommendation of the Language Nest model itself, as a powerful language revitalisation exemplar. At the same time, given the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic-cultural communities across Australia, I equally recommend that each community flexibly adopt, adapt (or indeed rightfully choose to reject) the Language Nest model to best accommodate their particular linguistic-cultural protocols, principles, prerogatives, processes and priorities. That is, I am aware that the recommendations listed below are shaped by my own particular experiences and exchanges (on Miriwoong Country and, thanks to my Churchill Fellowship opportunity, in countries and communities across the globe) and that, while many of these may be of use value for other communities across Australia, this is not something that should be automatically assumed, and should not come before further localised recommendations from distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups. The purpose of this Report is not to promote a single language revitalisation approach, but simply to provide information and inspiration to communities who are considering the Language Nest-style option.

As methods, meanings and measures of ‘best practice’ can indeed depend on the context within which language revitalisation work is being carried out, the recommendations proposed here are fairly broad or overarching in nature. However, as integral – and often interrelated – examples of how emerging Language Nest-style programs in Australia can be supported and strengthened into the future, I would endorse the following proposals:

- For Australian federal, state and/or local governments to hold themselves accountable to making strong commitments to the provision of adequate and appropriate infrastructure and resourcing for community-level language revitalisation initiatives, but not provide governance over them. While it may read counterintuitively to suggest for ‘governments not to govern,’ it is imperative for Language Nest-style programs to be community-led, owned and operated if they are to have the most empowering and effective results. As such, it is similarly vital for any politico-legal infrastructure, documentation and communications pertaining to the recognition and revitalisation of First Languages to be flexibly yet responsively based on deep consultation across the breadth of distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic-cultural contexts.

- For government and/or external bodies to dedicate clear and consistent funding streams for Language Nest and wider language revitalisation programs in order to actively support the start up, and sustainability, of these programs.\(^{108}\) While accommodating responsiveness to evaluative learnings and diverse community contexts, these funding streams should otherwise be ongoing and consistently titled, timed and targeted. They should also accommodate an understanding, within funding rhetoric and requirements, that ‘value for money’ should not be expected to be exclusively represented by short-term financial self-sustainability. As Professor Rawinia Higgins relevantly reminded me, “it only takes one generation to lose a language, but three generations to (fully) revive a language” – language revitalisation is a long-term process, all the while having evidenced potential to bring about powerful long-term benefits (‘value’) across the socio-cultural, educational, health and employment/economic sectors alike. Particularly when Language Nest-style initiatives are delivered through not-for-profit community organisations, in socio-economically disadvantaged

\(^{108}\) Indeed, some Academics such as Professor Ghil’ad Zuckermann have advocated that, even outside of specific funding for language revitalisation programs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should have access to a clear and consistent form of ‘native tongue title’ – a compensatory or reparative measure for addressing the intergenerational impacts of First Languages loss at the hands of unjust colonial policies and practices. I certainly support the premise of this proposal.
communities, conditional funding arrangements based on an expectation for short-term financial profitability are neither most fair, feasible, or conducive to sustained success.

• For formal evaluative processes pertaining to Language Nest-style programs to be based on stronger trust in the legitimacy and efficacy of community-led self-assessment, and a stronger focus on qualitative success indicators.

• For careful, consultative investigation into opportunities for providing centralised administrative support for Language Nest-style programs across the country, only if such opportunities would not compromise the localised integrity and imperatives of individual Language Nest-style initiatives.

• For Language Nest-style programs to focus on the provision of physically, financially and culturally accessible education, which can be supported by Language Nest staff themselves having access to culturally and socio-economically accessible training, resourcing and employment opportunities. It is important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and language speakers, as well as their unique pedagogical principles and approaches, to be recognised as qualified teachers and curricula in their own right, and for teaching staff to be recruited and remunerated accordingly. The Western Australian Department of Education’s Aboriginal Languages Teacher Training program provides quite a responsive pathway in this regard, although there is certainly scope to strengthen and extend such pathways across the country.

• For Language Nest-style environments to focus on fostering organic learning, even if through strategic teaching. That is, particularly in contexts where fluency levels are limited, teachers may need to draw on strategic pedagogical tools (such as an attention to core ‘survival phrases’; structurally predictable but engaging routines; and accompanying non-verbal stimuli or communicative methods) to facilitate a full immersion environment. Nevertheless, to comfortably and meaningfully ‘normalise’ children’s immersive language learning experience, it can be important to simultaneously draw on curriculum activities and communications that organically emulate the kinds of socio-cultural rituals, conversations, and interactions of everyday community life.

• For a strong focus on intergenerational and cross-contextual learning within Language Nest-style programs, and wider language revitalisation processes. Where preschool-based language learning opportunities exist, it is certainly worth working to complement these with school-based opportunities (and vice versa). Encouraging the involvement of Elders, parents, families and wider community members can further help to foster home-based learning alongside Nest-based education, and can positively help to promote a shared sense of responsibility, accountability and pride in the language revitalisation process.

• For the emphasis on language revitalisation in Language Nest-style programming to be understood to go hand-in-hand with language documentation. Transcribing, safely archiving, digitising and consistently consulting documentary language materials can play an important part in the professional development of Language Nest staff, and in ensuring sustained access to robust reference materials for shaping Language Nest curriculum planning. Where relevant, appropriately facilitated lexicon expansion processes may also play into ongoing documentation work, helping to ensure that the language itself remains responsive and dynamic, and so in turn allowing full immersion to continue in contemporary classroom and community environments.

• For mainstream Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses to incorporate a stronger focus on the context, complexities and importance of First Languages, including not only traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, but also creole/Kriol languages, and dialects such as Aboriginal

\[109\] (and quality)
\[110\] (and indeed post-school)
English. Such a focus is not to suggest that all educators have an authority to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages\textsuperscript{111}, but that they have a responsibility to teach about those languages – their histories, their diversity, and their continued significance. It may also support (pre)school teachers and educators to better identify whether their students are English-as-a-Second-Language speakers (with an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Kriol home language); Aboriginal English speakers; or English speakers with special needs; and so, in turn, respond to students’ learning needs accordingly.

- For Language Nest-style programs to be positioned within a network of carefully coordinated and collaborative programs that recognise the reciprocally influential relationship between First Languages skill development, wider educational development, and wider community development. Such coordination and collaboration requires an informed awareness of the fact that, in order to harness the strongest and widest benefits of Language Nest-style initiatives, the Language Nest model should not be relegated to the spheres of ‘linguistics,’ ‘education,’ and/or ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs’ alone, and, particularly in the longer-term, can have mutually reinforcing relationships with wider (health, employment, socio-economic etc.) sectors. Promoting a shared awareness and integrated service approach between diverse contributors such as Language Nest staff; wider teachers and educators; academic/field linguists; cultural anthropologists; community development officers; speech pathologists and wider allied health professionals, can therefore be of critical benefit.

- For appropriate educational initiatives/campaigns to raise a stronger public awareness of the continued importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to reconciliatory processes within Australian society at large. Raising such awareness may also need to be coupled with a redirection of individual or societal mindsets – moving beyond deficit discourses around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their languages, and instead stimulating strengths-based conversations regarding community-led language revitalisation processes. Strengths-based conversations similarly need to move beyond a simplistic attitude or rhetoric of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being cultural ‘niceties’ to instead reflect their place as cultural necessities – tied also to socio-emotional and educational benefits that play out in broader contexts that extend beyond the linguistic-cultural sphere.

- For regular celebratory events pertaining to First Languages, and progress made within language revitalisation journeys, to be meaningfully coordinated at the local and/or national scale. This year’s NAIDOC Week celebrations, centred around the theme of Our Languages Matter, were a really positive example. It would, nevertheless, be of value to establish and extend more regularly scheduled rather than once-off celebratory opportunities, to maintain morale and momentum behind Language Nest-style initiatives.

- For positive dialogues and exchange relationships to be more strongly facilitated between diverse contributors to Language Nest-style programs, both nationally and internationally. My Churchill Fellowship experience certainly reinforced just how much strength and practical inspiration can come out of the simple act of sharing stories, learnings and experiences with others committed to a similar cause or aspiration, even if approaches to achieving that aspiration may be variable.

- For communities considering or commencing Language Nest style-programs to be positively reminded not to give up, with the case studies in this Report showcasing what can be possible even in some incredibly challenging contexts. While being prepared for perhaps multiple and multifaceted challenges over time, communities can be reminded to invest in the people (and in the ‘people

\textsuperscript{111} Indeed, quite the opposite – the focus should raise awareness, among non-Indigenous teachers and educators in particular, about the importance of respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols around who has the authority to teach language, and with whom, where, when, and how.
power’) of those who genuinely commit to the language revitalisation journey, reassured that (in the words of Heke Huata) “kei a tatou ano te ara tika” – the answers are within us.

Again, the recommendations outlined above are overarching and predominantly macro-level in nature. It is important not to expect all to be immediately feasible or fitting in each community context without localised and more micro-level steps towards achieving them. While high expectations and strong visions for the long-term are vital, it can be simultaneously crucial to start small and work on a considered, step-by-step basis to ensure solid program foundations and sustainable succession planning. When it comes to the more minute details of a Language Nest’s design/implementation, communities are encouraged to adopt, adapt and add to the programming features and functions described in the main body of this Report, as they best see fit for their unique linguistic-cultural context.

In all, it is exciting to consider the future of Language Nest-style initiatives in Australia. While I flew across the globe, thousands of Language Nest ‘fledglings’ – those strong and clever children growing up with immersion-based First Languages learning – were certainly spreading their wings and soaring high! I have returned to Australia with a reinvigorated hope for Language Nest-style programs – and program participants – here at home to similarly take flight, and reach great heights, into the future.

My Next Steps

A key ‘take-home’ message from my Churchill Fellowship trip is that language revitalisation is a lifelong journey. As such, I feel I still have many more steps to take, and to support, for many years into the future. Nevertheless, based on my Fellowship learnings and experiences, just some of my more immediate ‘next steps’ include:

- Sharing the learnings within and surrounding this Report with my networks across the Australian linguistics, education, reconciliation, social services and community development spheres. Where relevant and appropriate, these learnings can also be fed into submissions to government, particularly regarding legislative or policy development processes pertaining to the protection and promotion of First Languages.
- Setting up a ‘next steps’ workshop with the team at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring in the 2017-18 school holiday period to consider how the Miriwoong Language Nest program could best be strengthened into the future, based on learnings from my Churchill Fellowship experience, as well as from the past four and a half years of the program’s running. Further workshopping around how the Miriwoong Language Nest team could indeed develop their own workshops or equivalent upskilling opportunities to deliver to other communities seeking support in the design/implementation of Language Nest-style initiatives could also be carried out.
- Maintaining an ongoing collaborative relationship with the team at Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring, particularly with regard to future research, curriculum planning and resource development relating to the Miriwoong Language Nest program.
- Working with a Kununurra-based film producer to create an audio-visual capture of a full-length Miriwoong Language Nest session in action. Many of my overseas hosts explained the value of filmic resources in the training of new staff, and in supporting other communities to understand what Language Nest environments can effectively ‘look like,’ where in-person visits to these environments are not possible.
- Exploring further avenues for facilitating digital or face-to-face dialogues between Language Nest contributors across diverse contexts so as to positively consolidate a strong (inter)national community of practice.
- Embedding learnings from my Churchill Fellowship experience into my everyday work with Reconciliation Australia’s Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning initiative. This initiative is designed to support the 20,000+ schools and early learning services in Australia to develop environments that foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions – which First Languages are a key part of.

- Investigating opportunities to sponsor an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language(s) award, celebration or innovation. I am endlessly grateful for the generosity of my Churchill Fellowship award, and chose not to luxuriate unnecessarily during my travels, so as to be able to meaningfully reinvest in worthwhile projects upon my return. After all, in the words of Sir Winston Churchill, “we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”