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The Government's failure to make the Chinese language part of the curriculum in all New Zealand schools could leave young Kiwis out of touch as China's importance grows, says the Chinese Language Foundation.

New curriculum guidelines set by the Ministry of Education have determined that all year 7 and 8 students should be offered a second international language, but have not specified which.

Chinese Language Foundation vice chair Maylene Lai says this policy fails to take into account that greater proficiency in Chinese is imperative both for trade and nation-building.

"Learning Chinese is not just important for the economic reason of getting us into China, but also helps in sharing communities. The society here is changing already and we need to manage that change, not become like an 'us' and 'them' with enclaves where you have a Chinatown versus the rest of the country."

Paul Clark, head of the Asian languages department at the University of Auckland, says New Zealanders are coming to realise the importance of Asian languages but it's a slow process.

"Our resistance is breaking down, and not before time. There's a much better awareness now of where we are. We're not in the Atlantic somewhere. We're at the bottom of Asia, and that's where our future lies."

Lai says the Government's decision to fund resources for all international languages equally is unfair, given that European languages such as French and German are already well-established in the education system with a large resource-base.

"The Ministry of Education says it can't favour one language over another. But they don't appreciate Chinese is only coming in and other languages have had the advantage before. China is a very poor country and doesn't have resources like the Goethe Institute or Alliance Francaise. The Chinese Government is realising it's important to support the Chinese language in New Zealand, but it's still in early days."

The Chinese Language Foundation, a charitable trust, is providing resources and teacher support to five schools throughout Auckland which teach Chinese.

"The idea is to show the Government it can be done," says Lai.

Gail Spence, Ministry of Education languages senior adviser, says resistance to the Chinese language is coming not from the Government, but from schools and students.

"Chinese is quite new here, and while the ministry has invested quite substantially in years 7 and 8, there's very low take-up of that resource, even though it's an excellent one. Most of that is because the demand is not coming from parents and students."

She says this is due to the perceived difficulty of the Chinese language, and to New Zealand's ethnic roots.

"If you think back to New Zealand's origins and where a lot of our population has come from, a lot of that is European."

St Andrew's School in South Canterbury is one of many New Zealand schools that have opted to offer a European language instead of an Asian one.

Principal Jeremy Marshall says Chinese has limited use for students outside large immigration centres such as Auckland.

"For kids in our communities, we thought the European languages would have greater relevance in terms of what they're likely to be offered at high school. And being South Canterbury, the students aren't as exposed to Asian communities."

He says the new language programme is justified, as it will increase students' capabilities in their native tongue.

"All research indicates that students who have another language are better at their main language, English."

Lai says the prevalent New Zealand attitude that foreign languages are of little necessity is "smug and self-complacent".

"It's a general malaise of being so far away that New Zealand doesn't appreciate they have to be globally connected, and part of that is some language prowess."

— Carmen Gray

Maori language chief calls for more te reo

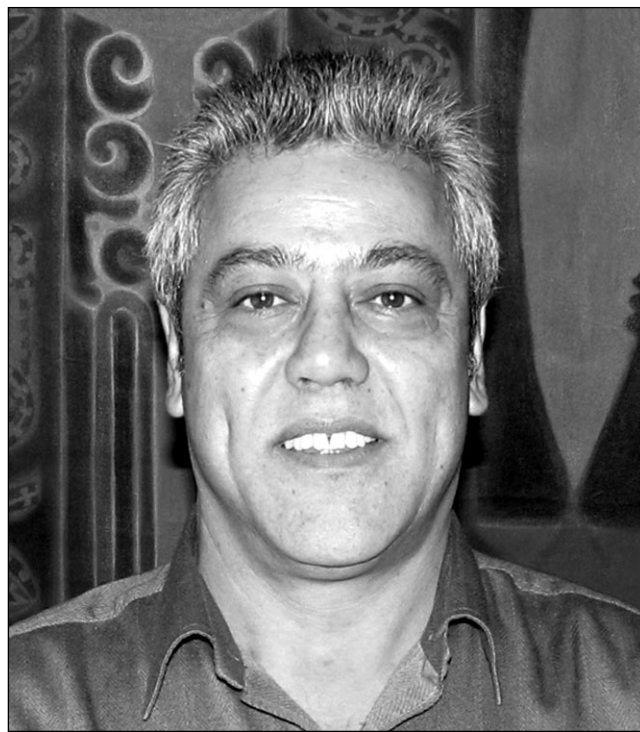


PHOTO: MAORI LANGUAGE COMMISSION

TE REO: Haami Piripi wants everyone to know the basics

by Qiane Corfield

The Ministry of Education is failing to engage with and support the Maori language, says Maori Language Commission chief executive Haami Piripi.

Piripi is disappointed te reo Maori still has not become an official part of the mainstream school curriculum despite such "official" celebrations as Maori Language Week.

Last year more than 65,000 pupils in years one to eight learned French, Japanese and Spanish. The number of students taught te reo Maori was 112,519, but most of those were attending bilingual or kura kaupapa schools.

"Multilingualism is good but there should be a broad appreciation of te reo before learning another language," he says.

"Everyone should understand the basics of Maori. It

is important to New Zealand's heritage."

Piripi believes learning te reo goes beyond just keeping it alive.

The ability to pronounce words correctly stops non-Maori from "murdering" them. And this learning starts at a young age.

Although primary schools are encouraged to integrate te reo Maori into everyday learning, there are no rules on how much should be included.

Ex-primary school teacher Christopher Whaanga has taught in both mainstream and kura Maori schools in Counties Manukau. In his experience, the inclusion of Maori in mainstream classrooms is very poor.

"In primary school classrooms across Auckland there is little more than a tokenistic gesture. Hanging a 'kia ora' sign on the wall is not good enough," he says.

"I think it is terrible that teachers are not held accountable when they fail to put effort into including te reo Maori."

Tone Kolose, Wymondley Road Primary School principal, agrees, saying 90 per cent of Maori in schools is tokenism and he urges schools to make links with the local kura kaupapa to support the teaching of Maori.

"The current human resources we have are stretched and material resources are not targeted at schools that have minimum knowledge of te reo, leaving it untaught," he says.

At Wymondley Road Primary, te reo Maori is incorporated as part of the curriculum through kapa haka and through a mau rakau after-school programme which helps promote self-belief.

However, this is one of the few schools which have such a passion for including te reo into its curriculum. According to Kolose, in most mainstream classrooms "the language is just not alive".

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Education says the decision is entirely up to the school.

"The Education Act requires that each school develops its own charter and that a school charter must contain a section that includes policies and practices that reflect New Zealand's cultural diversity, and the unique position of the Maori culture for full-time students whose parents ask for it."

Piripi says this isn't good enough. He believes the lack of te reo Maori in the classroom is due to a shortage in trained teachers and blames it on a "failure to strategically identify the gap" by the ministry.

Plea for more PI men on campus

by Vicky Crawford

While New Zealand's Pacific Island women are signing up for tertiary education in droves, their male counterparts have been left playing catch-up.

The number of Pacific students participating in tertiary education increased by 70.2 per cent between 2000 and 2004 but an overwhelming majority of these are women.

At AUT University 1126 Pacific women enrolled in 2006 compared with just 645 men. At postgraduate level the differences are even more pronounced with only 11 men studying.

AUT Pacific adviser Isabella Rasch says it's time to get more Pacific men on campus.

"At a recent postgraduate conference there were these strong, intelligent Pacific women all round but the men were nowhere to be seen."

One man working to restore the balance is New Zealand Samoan Sam Luteru who is completing a masters degree in communications at AUT.

Luteru says men have traditionally been seen as the breadwinners and they find it difficult to commit the time needed to study for tertiary qualifications.

"In some cases they are working to free their partners up to study."

But he says all Pacific people will benefit if men get an education.



PHOTO: MARC CHECKLEY

Isabella Rasch

"It will enhance their prospects of stable employment. Higher education equals better pay."

The discrepancies in achievement between males and females are starting well before university. Ministry of Education figures show 15,886 more Pacific females gained NCEA credits than Pacific boys in 2005.

Luteru says schools are struggling to inspire young Pacific Island men. He says boys who show early talent in sports are not always given the encouragement they need to pursue their academic studies.

He admits motivating boys who have one eye on the sports field is no easy task but he warns against "pigeonholing" boys too early.

"The problem is, for many, the dream of becoming the next Tana

Umaga will remain just that.

"They are just an injury away from the end of their career. What will they fall back on?" Luteru asks.

This trend towards sport over academics is worrying AUT student recruitment manager Gareth Dyer.

"Our boys need to have a plan B. They need to be good at both," he says.

"Many of our Pacific boys have their eyes on a professional sports career. They have plenty of role models in this area and in many cases their families support them in their dream. They see it as a good way to support them financially."

Dyer also sees a lot of boys bombing out in the first two semesters.

"They can't cope with the level of freedom at university and they also have jobs and family stuff impacting on their time. The worst thing, however, is their reluctance to ask for help before it's too late."

AUT Pacific liaison Ronji Tanielu says educating Pacific men is essential for their spiritual and cultural development.

"Men have always had mantles of leadership in our culture and developing those leaders will lead to repercussions for Pacific peoples in general," says Tanielu.

"We need to produce role models from areas other than sport and to break down the stereotypes of Pacific men in the media which is so geared towards sport and violence."