EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF TE REO MĀORI TRAUMA

Dr Mohi Rua

Citation: Rua, M. (2025). *Everyday Experiences of Te Reo Māori Trauma*. Wellington: Te Mātāwai.

ISBN Number (online): 978-1-0671012-0-6
Cover image: By Whitinga Harris, Te Mātāwai
Published: December 2025
Website: temātāwai.māori.nz

Contents

Executive Summary

This report investigates the complex phenomenon known as 'Te reo Māori trauma'. which refers to the emotional, psychological, and spiritual distress experienced by Māori individuals due to a lack of proficiency in te reo Māori (Roa & Roa, 2023). As a fundamental aspect of Māori cultural identity, te reo Māori is recognised as a taonga (treasure) that embodies the collective history, values, and knowledge of the Māori world. This report emphasises the critical importance of te reo Māori in preserving cultural identity and highlights the various barriers that prevent the effective acquisition and revival of te reo Māori that can result in and exacerbate te reo Māori trauma.

Introduction and Background

Te reo Māori serves as a vital marker of Māori identity and cultural expression. According to the Waitangi Tribunal (2011), it is the foundation upon which mātauranga Māori (Māori epistemologies) stands. The relationship between language and culture is profound; losing a language equates to losing the cultural nuances embedded within it since language is a repository of heritage, crucial for the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations (Fishman, 2007; UNESCO, 2024). Despite its significance, the proficiency levels in te reo Māori among Māori have seen glacial improvement over the years. Data from various surveys indicate that a significant portion of the Māori population remains disconnected from their language. For instance, a 2001 survey revealed that only 42% of Māori adults could speak a few words of te reo Māori, with only a marginal increase to 48% in a 2018 survey. Notably, just 18% of respondents reported having some proficiency in the language (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2001, 2020; Te Whata, 2024a).

The Concept of Te Reo Māori Trauma

This report introduces the term 'te reo Māori trauma', defined by Roa and Roa (2023) as the emotional and psychological distress resulting from harmful events associated with language loss. This trauma manifests in various ways, including language anxiety and feelings of shame (whakamā) for not being able to speak te reo Māori. Language anxiety can lead to withdrawal from cultural contexts, impacting social interaction and mental health. This report highlights personal narratives that illustrate the experiences of individuals grappling with language loss and te reo Māori trauma.

Cultural Identity and Language

The report also raises critical questions about Māori identity in the context of language. It explores the notion of a 'fixed Māori identity', which argues that specific cultural markers such as te reo Māori, knowledge of whakapapa (genealogy) and mātauranga Māori, are essential for affirming one's Māori identity. This perspective is supported by traditional whakatauki (proverbs) that emphasize the significance of te reo Māori in determining the authenticity of one's cultural identity as Māori. However, the report also recognises the tension that arises from a fixed identity, particularly given that a significant majority of contemporary Māori lack proficiency in te reo Māori (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2001, 2020; Te Whata, 2024a). In contrast, McIntosh's concept of a 'fluid Māori identity' offers a more inclusive understanding that accommodates diverse experiences of being Māori today which includes most of the Māori population who do not speak te reo. This fluid identity acknowledges the impact of colonialism, urbanisation, and the influence of other cultures on contemporary Māori identity as well as language loss which has resulted in te reo Māori trauma.

Methodology

This report employed a qualitative approach, utilising pūrākau (stories) (Lee, 2009) to explore the lived experiences of Kaikōrero regarding te reo Māori trauma. A semi-structured interview schedule was used with general prompts to guide the discussion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lee, 2009; Lyons, 2003). The participating group includes three Kaikōrero, for an understanding of the emotional and psychological impacts of te reo Māori trauma. While the findings of the small number of Kaikōrero is not generalisable to the broader Māori population, their stories offer insights to broader issues that shapes Māori experiences of te reo Māori trauma.

Analysis

The analysis section of this report is divided into two sub-sections. Sub-section one provides in-depth reflections on the experiences of three Kaikōrero: a husband-and-wife (Kana and Māpihi) duo in the first sub-section, and an individual, Eru, in the second sub-section. The sub-sections synthesise the experiences of te reo Māori trauma, challenges, and successes encountered on their journeys with te reo Māori.

Sub-section One (Kana and Māpihi): Their stories illustrate the profound impact of not growing up with the language. They discuss the fear of making mistakes, which often hinders their willingness to engage with te reo. Additionally, they reflect on the emotional toll of cultural expectations, the difficulties faced in te reo Māori courses, and how Kura Māori plays a crucial role in healing intergenerational trauma associated with language loss.

Sub-section Two (Eru): Eru's narrative sheds light on the absence of te reo in his whānau and upbringing. He describes his fear of being judged negatively for his lack of proficiency, the impact of public humiliation, and his journey toward decolonisation to better understand the challenges of learning te reo.

The analysis reveals profound experiences of trauma associated with the absence of te reo Māori in their upbringing, fears of making mistakes and the pressure to be proficient in te reo Māori. Kaikōrero expressed feelings of whakamā (shame) when speaking Māori, stemming from unnecessary judgments and

cultural expectations within their communities. These cultural expectations place pressure on Kaikōrero to be proficient in te reo Māori, which leads to feelings of inadequacy and sometimes disengagement. Kaikōrero also highlight the intergenerational impacts of reo Māori suppression, and they recount how the trauma experienced by earlier generations continues to affect their engagement with te reo Māori, creating barriers to their use and learning. Collectively, Kaikōrero narratives emphasise that the loss of te reo Māori and associated trauma is more than a personal issue, but a broader cultural concern affecting whānau, hapū and iwi more broadly.

Mātauranga Hou

The contribution this report can make to te reo Māori trauma research is focused in three areas. Firstly, while individual accounts of reo trauma are important, the experience of reo trauma is a relational one that occurs within a broader historical context of te reo Māori suppression that all Māori communities experience. Secondly, te reo Māori trauma is associated with what it means to be Māori. This report challenges the notion of a fixed Māori identity based solely on reo Māori proficiency, arguing for a more fluid understanding that embraces the historical loss of te reo Māori and the diversity of contemporary Māori experiences. Finally, this report proposes that te reo Māori trauma as a working definition should not be pathologised as an individual experience and emphasises the interconnected nature of individual and collective experiences of reo trauma. As a result of, any initiative to combat te reo Māori trauma needs to be relational and interconnected with whānau, hapū, iwi, communities and the Crown.

Final Comments

Te reo Māori trauma is a multifaceted issue rooted in Aotearoa's colonial histories of injustices, suppression and oppression, that has also contributed in the socio-cultural and economic disparities Māori experience today. The narratives expressed by Kaikōrero in this report highlight the psychological, emotional and spiritual scars left by the loss of te reo Māori. Addressing these traumas requires an array of individual and communal based initiatives from institutions, policymakers, and communities generally that ensures te reo Māori can flourish for future generations.

1

Section 1: Introduction and Background

Te Reo Māori: The platform for Mātauranga Māori

Te reo Māori is not only a fundamental marker of Māori cultural identity (Hutchings et al., 2017) but also considered a taonga (treasure) by the Waitangi Tribunal (2011). According to the Tribunal (2011), te reo Māori is "...the platform upon which mātauranga Māori stands, and the means by which Māori culture and identity are expressed. Without it, that identity, indeed the very existence of Māori as a distinct people, would be compromised" (p. 154). This underscores the profound relationship between language and identity, a connection also articulated by Fishman (2007), who emphasises that the essence of a culture is intricately woven into its language.

> *The most important relationship between language and culture that gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Take it away from the culture and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. The culture could not be expressed and handed on in any other way. What would be left? When you are talking about the language most of what you are talking about is the culture. That is, you are losing all the things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and the human reality that you are talking about* **(Fishman, 2007, p. 72)**.

The work of Fishman (2007) echoes UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) assertion that languages like te reo Māori, are repositories of human heritage and knowledge, essential for the management of politics, creation narratives, governance as well as socio-cultural and economic domains (UNESCO, 2024).

The State of Te Reo Māori

Despite the significance of te reo Māori as a taonga, access to and proficiency in te reo Māori remain limited for many Māori today. In the 1996 Census, only 25% of Māori claimed to converse in te reo Māori which then reduced to 21% in the 2013 Census (Hutchings et al., 2017). A 2001 survey of 5000 Māori adults aged 15 years and older, also revealed that only 42% could speak a few words or phrases in te reo Māori (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2001). By 2018, a Te Kupenga survey (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020) of 8,500 Māori adults (aged 15 years and over) showed a slight increase, with 48% reporting they could speak a few words or phrases. However, only 18% from the 2018 Te Kupenga survey claimed to be of conversational proficiency in the language (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020). Ratima and May

(2011) define proficiency in te reo Māori as the ability to speak, listen, read, and write, allowing for spontaneous communication with fluent reo Māori speakers.

Nonetheless, the data from the 2013 Te Kupenga survey (Te Whata, 2024a) also indicated that only 2.6% of respondents claimed te reo Māori as the primary language spoken in the home, which dropped further to 1.8% in the 2018 survey. This decline signals a concerning trend regarding the future sustainability of te reo Māori. The 2018 Te Kupenga survey also revealed that respondents who identified te reo Māori as their first language comprised 16% of Kaumātua (born before 1963), 12% of Pakeke (born between 1964 and 1983), and 21% of Rangatahi (born between 1984 and 2003). While the overall number of speakers serves as a valuable indicator to the precarious nature of te reo Māori, intergenerational transmission is arguably the most critical dimension of language health. The comparatively higher percentage among Rangatahi (21%) as first language speakers, suggests a potential resurgence in the transmission of te reo Māori across generations. Overall, these statistics only provide a basic insight into the state of te reo Māori, they do not capture the underlying issues that contribute to the decline of te reo Māori.

The Role of the Education System in Suppressing Te Reo Māori

The alarmingly low number of te reo Māori speakers can be traced back over the past century, directly linked to the colonial assimilationist agenda enforced through the education system. According to Albury (2015) this system was designed to suppress Māori language and culture. The Native Schools Act of 1867 established Māori village schools that were required to teach in English, followed by the 1880 Native Schools Code, which aimed to eliminate the use of Māori as swiftly as possible, often enforced by physical punishment. As Māori children grew into adulthood, many refrained from speaking te reo Māori at home for fear their children would also be punished at school, establishing a legacy of English-monolingual Māori after the World Wars (Albury, 2015).

The traumatic memories of corporal punishment for speaking te reo Māori are echoed in the testimonies of Māori leaders such as Kaa Williams and Former Minister of Māori Affairs Dover Samuels. Williams recalls:

> *Ka haere au ki te kura, ka tae ki te kēti, ka kī mai taku tungane, "ka kuhu koe I tēnei kēti, kaua koe e kōrero Māori". Tino mataku mātou I taua wā nā te tino hāmene pea I runga I a mātou. He rōpu I reira. Te mahi a taua rōpu, he harihari kōrero pēnei, "kai te kōrero Māori a mea mā". No reira, ka kuhu mai ana mātou ki roto I te rūmā, ka kī mai te kaiwhakaako, "e koe, e tū, e tū, e tū", ka patua o mātau ringa mā te rākau. Korekore ana tōku Whaea, e patu I a mātau. Kore. Nō reira he mea hou katoa ēnei, ki ahau I te kura* **(Williams, 2024)**.
>
> *I went to school, and when I reached the gate, my brother said to me, 'when you go through this gate, don't you speak Māori.' We were really scared at that time because we felt very pressured. There was a group there. The group's task was to tell the teachers, 'So and so is speaking Māori.' So, when we entered the room, the teacher would say, 'You, stand up,' and we were hit on the hands with a stick. My mother never hit us. So, all of this was something new for me at school* **(Williams, 2024)**.

Similarly, Samuels recounts his school experience in the late 1940s.

> *We'd be lined up in front of the class, asked to bend over, and caned... All solely for speaking te reo...We had to leave our reo, our tikanga, at the door with our horses... The impact of that was everlasting, this agenda of disempowerment.* **(Dover Samuels, a former MP and Māori Affairs Minister, started school in the late 1940s, as cited in Nielson, 2020)**

Beyond the obvious physical violence, Māori also experienced what Darder (1991 as cited in Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011) describes as 'a form of psychological violence', the systemic suppression of thoughts, ideas, emotions, values and beliefs communicated through language (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a, 2011b; May, 2023; Smith, 1989; Te Huia, 2015, 2023; Te Huia & Madder, n.d.; Waitangi Tribunal, 2011; Walker, 1990; Warren, 2017). The loss of language, compounded by corporal punishment, results in not only linguistic deprivation but also cultural disconnection and identity loss, severely restricting access to mātauranga Māori (Māori ways of being and doing) (Fishman, 2007; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a; UNESCO, 2024). The suppression of te reo Māori is also intricately linked to the historical injustices of colonisation, which resulted in loss of land, disconnection from cultural identity and inter-generational poverty. This historical trauma continues to affect Māori mental health, social cohesion, and economic opportunities, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage as reflected in the impoverished socio-economic profile of Māori today (Ministry of Health, 2024a, 2024b; Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2021).

Contemporary Socio-Economic Profile of Māori

The socio-economic disparities facing Māori today are stark. For instance, the life expectancy for Māori men is 73.4 years, 7.5 years less than non-Māori men (80.9 years), and for Māori women, it is 77.1 years, 7.3 years less than non-Māori women (84.4 years). Major causes of death for Māori include preventable non-communicable diseases such as ischaemic heart disease, lung cancer, suicide, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases. Socio-economic challenges are further illustrated by the fact that 26.5% of Māori live in the most deprived areas (decile 10), compared with 7.6% of non-Māori. Māori adults have a lower school completion rate (55.2%) than non-Māori (67.8%) leading to twice the unemployment rate (8.1% compared to 3.3%). Additionally, Māori are more likely to live in overcrowded households (20.8) compared with non-Māori (9.1) and 40% of Māori live in damp houses compared to non-Māori (24%) which increases their risk of respiratory diseases (Ministry of Health, 2024a, 2024b; Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2021).

Homeownership, a key indicator for wealth-building opportunities, reveals that only 27.5% of Māori own their homes compared to 51% of non-Māori (Te Whata, 2024b). Alarmingly, Māori represent 52.8% of the prison population, with Māori men making up 51% of inmates and Māori women 65% of female inmates (Department of Corrections, 2023; McIntosh & Workman, 2017). These health disparities highlight the pervasive impacts of colonialism that has disrupted Māori ways of being and doing, including the suppression of te reo Māori. The existing challenges for Māori stem from policies that have marginalised Māori communities, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage and language loss. This loss has resulted in feelings of whakamā and anxiety among many Māori when engaging te reo Māori, which Roa and Roa (2023) refer to as 'te reo Māori trauma'.

Te Reo Māori trauma

'Te reo Māori trauma' is defined by Roa and Roa (2023) as, "a person's emotional, psychological, spiritual distress, and/or physical injury caused by harmful events or by association to harmful events, which directly impacts their ability and/or willingness to learn and/or speak te reo Māori" (p. 4). This trauma manifest in various ways, as highlighted in the recent works of Te Huia (2022, 2023), which shed light on how Māori experience language anxiety and shame (whakamā) for their inability to speak te reo Māori.

Language anxiety can create a state of apprehension, negatively influencing behaviour in cultural contexts, environments or dialogue. During Māori cultural encounters, language anxiety might manifest as shyness, reservation or embarrassment over lacking te reo Māori proficiency, leading individuals to withdraw from situations that provoke these feelings, thereby jeopardising their social and mental wellbeing (Durie, 2001, 2004; Hamley, 2023; Hashemi, 2011; Horwitz, 1986; Te Huia, 2022). In a recent article by Michelle Campbel (2025), the anxiety, frustration and difficulty of learning te reo Māori was referred to by her as the 'taniwha of shame'. Campbell (2025) reflects upon how her daily reo learning experience can be "...spent contending with a taniwha...my inability to communicate and understand creates an anxiety that often spirals into feelings of unworthiness". The notion of a taniwha came up as a metaphor she learnt during one of her reo wānanga, "Patua te taniwha whakamā. Beat the taniwha of shame". The taniwha being a feeling of unease, or nervousness or even fear and the challenge is to control and overcome or 'beat' as Campbell puts it, the taniwha. This 'taniwha' of anxiety and shame can compromise one's cultural identity, questioning the legitimacy of one's Māori identity, especially when that identity is often defined by the presence and proficiency of te reo Māori (Durie, 2001, 2002, 2004; Hamley, 2023; Higgins et al., 2014; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a; May, 2023; Waitangi Tribunal, 2011; Wetherell & Potter, 1993).

These complex issues raise some critical questions: What does it mean to be Māori? Is te reo Māori the primary marker of a valid Māori identity? Addressing these questions is challenging due to the lack of definitive criteria (Durie, 1997; Durie, 1994; Kukutai, 2004; Rameka, 2018). However, Te Huia's (2023) work on Māori identity provides valuable insights, drawing upon Tracey McIntosh's concept of a 'fixed Māori identity'(Te Huia, 2023). This notion posits that specific cultural markers, such as knowledge of whakapapa, mātauranga Māori, te reo Māori and tikanga, are necessary to affirm a person's Māori identity. If any of these markers are absent, the authenticity of that identity may be questioned.

Support for a 'fixed Māori identity' can be found in traditional whakatauki such as this by Sir James Hēnare as part of the Waitangi Tribunal hearings in 1985, "ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori – the language is the lifeforce of the mana Māori (Māori prestige and authority" (Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 1988). This whakatauki suggests that an individual's 'mana' (status, prestige, or identity) as a Māori person is inherently linked to the presence of te reo Māori. This view aligns with the perspective of te reo Māori expert Sir Timoti Karetu, who believes that te reo Māori is fundamental to his Māori sense of self, as it distinguishes him from non-Māori (Te Huia, 2015). However, the concept of a 'fixed Māori identity' warrants critique, particularly since 78% of contemporary Māori are not proficient in te reo Māori (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2024; Te Whata, 2024a). In response, McIntosh (Te Huia, 2023) offers an alternative in the form of a 'fluid identity'. A fluid-identity accounts for the diverse external and internal influences, such as colonialism, urbanisation and the impact of other cultural groups, that have contributed to how Māori define themselves today (Burne-Field, 2021; Busbridge, 2016; Durie, 1997; Gagné, 2013; Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a; Ka'ai, 2017; Te Huia, 2023).

A 'fluid-Māori identity' is not solely tied to fluency or proficiency in te reo Māori. This aligns with the views of Webber (2012) and Sibley et al (2013), who suggest that a contemporary Māori identity is multidimensional, with te reo Māori serving as just one of the many cultural tools that shape the Māori experience. Research also supports this perspective, such as a survey of young Māori tertiary students, in which 96% rejected the notion that fluency in te reo Māori is critical to their Māori identity (Albury, 2016; Albury & Carter, 2018).

A 'fluid Māori identity' also allows contemporary Māori to maintain a sense of authenticity in their cultural identity, even if their proficiency in te reo Māori is limited or non-existent. As Burne-Field (2021) aptly states, "we can be Māori and *reo-less* at the same time". Supporting a 'fluid Māori identity' does not mean rejecting the importance of learning te reo Māori. Rather, it advocates for a more complex and nuanced understanding of Māori identity. One that recognises the socio-historical and colonial context that has shaped and continues to shape the Māori experience today.

Aim of the report

The aim of this project is to explore the everyday personal experiences of Māori who experience te reo Māori trauma as defined by Roa and Roa (2023) and to provide insights into the nature and origins of this trauma. There are four key objectives worthy of investigation for this project.

- **Objective 1:** Consider the historical context of a person's experience regarding structural practices such as policies and legislation that systematically removed te reo Māori from Māori.
- **Objective 2:** Consider the everyday manifestation of te reo Māori loss where experiences of cultural loss, whakamā and sense of marginalisation resulted in a cultural identity crisis.
- **Objective 3:** Consider how the trauma associated with te reo Māori loss intersects with other forms of trauma such as historical and intergenerational trauma which is reflected in the health disparities and inequities Māori experience compared to non-Māori.
- **Objective 4:** Relates to how Māori resist and overcome the experiences of te reo Māori trauma

The research aim, and objectives are intended to assist Te Mātāwai with the following:

a) To document and enhance understanding of te reo Māori trauma within its contextualised framework.

b) To offer insights into the repercussions of te reo Māori trauma on language acquisition, retention, and the increase of competency and confidence.

c) To provide an understanding of how te reo Māori trauma affects individuals and communities, hindering their ability to communicate thoughts, emotions, and ideas effectively in te reo Māori.

d) To offer insights that might inform interventions aimed at addressing te reo Māori trauma and providing support for Māori language learners, kāinga, hāpori and Iwi.

Through careful documentation and analysis of te reo Māori trauma, tools might be developed by Te Mātāwai to address and mitigate the impacts of te reo Māori trauma. By delving into the lived experience, valuable insights might be found that could inform targeted interventions and support strategies for individuals, families, and communities affected by te reo Māori trauma. Finally, the literature on language trauma has already been covered by Te Mātāwai's Roa and Roa (2023) and a further review of reo Māori trauma is not required for this report.

2

Section 2: Methodology

This project adopts a qualitative approach within the broader Kaupapa Māori research tradition to explore the lived experiences of Māori individuals who have encountered trauma related to te reo Māori. A Kaupapa Māori approach can be understood as a process of 'consciousness' that prioritises Māori knowledge systems and decentres Pākehā hegemony (Hutchings & Lee, 2016; Pihama, Cram & Walker, 2002).

Pūrākau (narrative inquiry)

This report employed a pūrākau approach, utilising storytelling as a means of narrative inquiry (Lee, 2009). This method was implemented through one-to-one narrative interviews, which provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration of Kaikōrero (research participants') experiences. The interviews served to gather background information and detailed, descriptive accounts of the Kaikōrero engagement with te reo Māori and the trauma associated with it.

The narrative approach allowed Kaikōrero to share meaningful insights into their lived experiences, offering a deeper understanding of the issues being investigated. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed flexibility, enabling the interviewer to seek clarification on unclear or ambiguous answers and to ask additional questions about the participants' pūrākau (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lee, 2009; Lyons, 2003). While the interviews focused on key discussion topics rather than a rigid set of questions, general prompts were used to encourage detailed, personal responses. This approach ensured that Kaikōrero could provide a comprehensive perspective on the trauma related to the suppression or loss of te reo Māori.

Sample group

The sample group consisted of three Kaikōrero, and while the small number of Kaikōrero limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader Māori population, their stories offer valuable, localised insights into specific events. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of broader systemic issues that shapes people's socio-cultural worlds (Simmel, 1997). All three Kaikōrero are Pakeke (born between 1964 and 1983) and they are children of Kaumātua (born prior to 1963) (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020), who experienced corporal punishment for speaking te reo Māori in schools. Additionally, these Kaikōrero were also part of the significant urban migration of Māori, moving away from their tribal lands to urban centres in search of work and educational opportunities. This migration increased exposure to Pākeha society and reinforced the dominance of te reo Pākeha and Pākeha ways of being and doing. It is also

important to highlight three additional points that contextualise this cohort, as these features are unique to this group of Kaikōrero and do not necessarily reflect the diverse experiences of many Māori. First, all three Kaikōrero experienced language loss within the generation immediately preceding them. This distinguishes them from whānau who have not spoken te reo Māori for two or more generations. Second, each of these Kaikōrero grew up with a strong sense of Māori identity, even if their language use was limited; this is not representative of all Māori, many of whom may not have maintained such connections. Finally, these Kaikōrero have demonstrated a persistent commitment to te reo Māori, overcoming setbacks and challenges, which has played a significant role in passing the language on to their children. Considering these points, this cohort can be regarded as atypical, given that many Māori face considerable obstacles in making substantial progress in language revitalization within their lifetimes.

Figure 1: Demographic information of the Kaikōrero.

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Occupation	Urban/rural	Child	Children in Kura Māori or Mainstream schools	Reo proficiency	Qualifications
Eru	48	Māori	Male	Māori Cultural Advisor	Urban	3	2 x mainstream; 1 x Kura Māori[1]	Conversational	University Entrance
Kana	50	Māori	Male	School Counsellor	Urban	3	3 x Kura Māori	Conversational	University Degree (undergraduate)
Māpihi	50	Māori	Female	Independent Education Contractor	Urban	3	3 x Kura Māori	Conversational	University Degree (undergraduate)

Structure of the following Sections

The following structure of this report consists of Section 3: Analysis; Section 4: Discussion; and Section 5: Concluding Comments. The Analysis Section 3 is separated into two sub-sections which focus on the reo Māori trauma experiences of three Kaikōrero, husband-and-wife duo (Kana and Māpihi) with a particular focus on the husband Kana's, reo trauma experience. Kana's wife Māpihi's insights are important too as a witness to the reo trauma of her husband. Sub-section two focuses on the reo trauma experiences of Eru. Section 4: Discussion will revisit some of the key issues raised in the analysis section and Section 5: Concluding Comments, will wrap up the report with some final comments.

1. Kura Māori are defined here as te reo Māori immersion primary and secondary schools

3

Section 3: Analysis

Sub-Section 1: Kana and Māpihi

This sub-section explores the personal experiences of Kana and his wife, Māpihi, focusing on how te reo Māori trauma has shaped their identities, their relationship, and their commitment to grounding their children in te ao Māori. It examines the historical context of language suppression, personal struggles, internal conflicts, cultural expectations, whānau dynamics, language privilege and the role of te reo Māori as a means of healing and intergenerational change. Both Kana and Māpihi are 50 years old, married, and have three children, all of whom have been educated in Kura Māori[2]. They both work in the education sector.

1. The absence of te reo Māori in upbringing

For many Māori, te reo Māori was not a regular part of their upbringing, as indicated by the fact that only 18% of Māori can hold a conversation in te reo (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2024; Te Whata, 2024a). Kana's experience reflects these statistics; he never heard te reo spoken at home and he assumed his parents' lacked proficiency. He was surprised to hear his father deliver a whaikōrero at a tangihanga.

> *I would have been about 11 or 12, maybe even older, than we realised that Dad was actually fluent in the reo and we freaked out one time, because Dad got up and started doing a whaikōrero at this tangi.*

When Kana asked his father why he never spoke te reo Māori to him and his siblings, his father shared the trauma he experienced and questioned the relevance of te reo in contemporary society.

> *He shared with us that he was part of that generation that had it beaten out of them... and this is how he put it to us, he thought 'it was a waste of fucking time' us learning. That's how he put it, which is why he never spoke it to us.*

Two key points arise from his father's reflections, both familiar to many Māori. First, the use of corporal punishment in schools during his father's generation led many to refrain from passing on that trauma to the next generation (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a). Second, when Kana's father dismisses te reo is *'a waste of fucking time'*, it echoes early colonial policies aimed at marginalising the language, rendering it irrelevant in an English dominated society (Albury, 2015). Even today, prominent figures often question the relevance of te reo Māori today, for instance, former National Party leader Don Brash stated that, *'te reo Māori is not a national issue but simply a Māori one'* (Don Brash as cited in Ngapo,

2. Kura Māori are defined here as te reo Māori immersion primary and secondary schools

2013, p. 4). Media personality Mike Hoskings (2018) claimed, *'it's of little use outside New Zealand'*, and the leader of the Act Party David Seymour, believes that training mainstream teachers in te reo Māori is a waste of time and resources (Hauiti, 2023). Other comments include *'you'll never get a job with te reo'* and *'it (te reo) should remain in the past'* (Albury, 2015; Higgins et al., 2014; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a; May, 2023; Te Huia, 2023; Wetherell & Potter, 1993). Such societal attitudes contribute to the perception that te reo is of little value, leading people like Kana's father, to view it as a burden rather than a resource.

Despite his father's beliefs, Kana was eager to learn te reo and felt deprived of his cultural heritage.

> *I didn't understand dad's journey at that stage too, and so there was a bit of resentment, well, quite a lot of resentment towards him, where it was like, "we didn't know you had this knowledge. You're the one that knew it. You didn't think it would have been good to start with us when we were babies, to share that knowledge. Now I've got, like, 30 years to make up", you know... And I guess... to be honest, I did question how Māori I was, you know, because I couldn't speak the reo.*

Kana's lack of proficiency in te reo Māori leads him to question his authenticity as Māori, equating language proficiency with his identity. This feeling of being 'reo-less' as Burne-Field (2021) describes, is a course of pain and shame for Kana and many others who lack proficiency (Hamley, 2023; Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a; May, 2023; Waitangi Tribunal, 2011; Wetherell & Potter, 1993).

2. The fear of making mistakes while learning te reo Māori

Kana's journey to learn te reo Māori as a second language is fraught with the fear of making mistakes, which deeply affects his self-confidence.

> *I don't like being wrong, so, you know, I didn't like being corrected, and so, what's the best way to not be corrected? Don't speak at all, you know. And so again, that was a barrier and it's still a work on for me.*

The fear is not uncommon among learners of te reo Māori. According to Ratima and May (2011), the fear of being wrong or corrected can create psychological barriers, suggesting a sense of inferiority compared to proficient speakers. Kana's reluctance to speak stems from this fear, despite knowing that making mistakes is a normal part of language learning (Houia, 2002). Research shows that accepting mistakes can transform the learning process into a positive one, fostering engagement (Te Huia, 2022). Fortunately, Kana recognises the opportunity he has working in a Wharekura, an environment of immersion in te reo Māori at a secondary school. The Wharekura allows him to engage with te reo daily, which may help him overcome his anxiety about making mistakes (Tocker, 2007).

> *And I've realised now, the Wharekura has been a great environment, being around it (reo) all day. Matua Kiwa... because I come back to that trauma thing, I guess my first year there (Wharekura), I probably run away from him (Matua Kiwa), because he speaks the reo to you all the time and so I found that quite intimidating. So literally, if I saw him coming to the rūma Kaiako (staff room), I'd bolt. Kia ora Matua... boom (run away).*

Kana acknowledges that Matua Kiwa is not the problem; rather his own insecurities are at play.

> *Then I started to learn with him (Matua Kiwa). He caters his reo to you, you know. And so now I can sit with that, again, my reo and my confidence with it... I guess that's the other thing that I've learned that's helped me grow, it's ok to make mistakes. We don't know it all (Kana).*

By accepting mistakes as part of his learning process, Kana has begun to engage more actively in speaking te reo Māori. However, this journey has not always been easy, especially during the early stages when he enrolled his children into a Kohanga Reo.

> *...with the Kohanga, my level of engagement was pretty limited, because I would literally, when I had to drop the kids off, race through, reach through and sign them in, push them through the door, and I would literally hear this, "Matua... Matua", and I'd be gunning for the gate (laughs). I still remember the first kohanga hui, and honestly, it was like the matrix, you know. For two hours I sat there having no idea, or a bit of an idea, but going, man, I'm catching bits, but that doesn't make sense in this context, you know. And then, it was quite funny, because the last ten minutes I started to go, ah, this is making sense with the matrix, then 'ka mutu te hui' (the meeting finished) (Kana laughs). You know, and then the next one, same thing...*

Many whānau experience similar emotional rollercoasters of fear and anxiety or what Kana calls his matrix, in Kohanga Reo (Hond-Flavell et al., 2021; Te Huia, 2022). Such anxieties can deter individuals from their reo journey, but for Kana, his matrix motivated him to ensure his children do not face the same challenges he has.

> *I wanted our kids to go through Kohanga, Kura and Wharekura... that was a lot to do with my journey. I didn't want my kids to be sitting at the marae like I did at times, you know. If I look at my boy, I wanted him to be, for example, sitting on the pae, and not sitting there like... I don't know what I'm going to say, I know what I want to say, but I don't know how to say it. So, I wanted our kids to have the tools... and a big driver for that, as I say, was my journey and not having the reo, which is ongoing... because I'd lived with that all my life in that sense of maybe not feeling Māori enough because I don't have the reo. So, I didn't want my kids to ever sit in that space.*

Kana is determined not to pass on his trauma, cultural unease and vulnerability to the next generation.

3. The expectation to be the whānau māngai

A significant aspect of Kana's reo journey involves his role as the tuakana (older sibling) within his whānau and the cultural expectation to serve as the māngai (whānau spokesperson), which includes responsibilities such as whaikōrero (formal speech-making). This role can carry considerable weight, especially in public settings like marae ātea, where one may face both praise and criticism (Kelly, 2017; Mead, 2013; Rewi, 2013). For a long time, Kana's teina (younger brother) was more proficient in te reo, and Kana was content to let him take on the māngai role, even as he felt uneasy about this shift in cultural roles.

> *I'm the tuakana, the mātāmua of the whānau. I kind of thought, my teina, he's got the reo now, I can probably just sit back. But it never actually sat that well with me. I didn't really know why at the time. It just didn't. But I was comfortable at the time, 'bro (teina) you got our kōrero'.*

This unease stems from the cultural convention that prioritises seniority of birth for whaikōrero speakers (Rewi, 2013). Although Kana recognised this convention, his early struggles with reo proficiency made it seem sensible to support his teina to avoid potential feelings of whakaiti (belittlement), whakamā (shame) and scorn due to his own language skills (Rewi, 2013; Te Huia, 2022). However, Kana's teina began to express his frustration about having to assume the speaker role constantly. Māpihi, Kana's wife recalls:

> *I remember a couple of key moments with his (Kana's) journey because I was sort of the one that was, you know, 'kaha whai atu i te reo' (spent a lot of energy learning te reo), and he was kind of not too interested, like that thing of cruising because his teina had them covered. Then we started noticing the teina was dropping a few resentful comments... like "ētā" you know, kind of like, "when you gonna step up? When you gonna start helping?" The teina just started dropping a few little resentful comments about having to be the speaker all the time, and I remember picking up on that and going, 'well, gee, my mate (Kana) better start doing something' (Māpihi).*

Kana also recognises the need to step into the māngai role, especially after a conversation with his father.

> *Then one day, dad sat down with me, and this wasn't too long ago, and he said, "If you're leaving that mahi to your brother who's doing his job?" And so that planted the seed (Kana).*

Kana's father emphasised the importance of stepping up and accepting his cultural responsibilities. Despite this encouragement, Kana struggled to reconcile this expectation. Eventually, his father reached out to Kana's wife Māpihi, for support. This is how Māpihi remembers:

> *And then the second thing was your dad reaching out to me on a text because I was studying (reo) at the Wānanga. I was off doing night classes, and his dad messaged me and said, "oh, Māpihi, I just respectfully ask that you step aside for now and let Kana study reo because he needs it". And so yeah, I took that on board. He's (Kana) got to do the paepae thing, I don't, and after that, that's when you started your journey at the Wānanga and enrolled (Māpihi).*

The message was significant, as it requested Māpihi sacrifice her interests for Kana's needs.

> *To say that he's got the guts to say that, and it was because of that thing, you're the mātāmua (eldest), you've got to be the māngai. So yeah, he (Kana's dad) pretty much knew that would probably happen if it came through me. With me going, OK, your dad's messaged me. I've got to step aside. You've got to start stepping up (Māpihi).*

However, taking on the māngai role came with it its own challenges, including the pressure of being compared to his father's cultural expertise according to Kana:

> *... that was a barrier too, because then you compare, you go "far, that's the level. That's the expectation that my people all have of me". So those things started to play out too and that was another bit of a 'takahi' (trample) to the confidence. Being son of, because he's so well known, and everyone knows he's a great orator... and the pressure that that brings, and the anxiety and angst (Kana).*

Kana's anxiety about living up to his father's legacy is understandable, given the expectations for whaikōrero speakers, who, according to Sir Timoti Karetu are expected to be "...the most articulate, the most eloquent and the most learned..." (Rewi, 2013, p. 57). Fortunately, Kana's father recognised his son's anxiety and offered reassuring advice.

> *What he did say, though, which was, you know, has been really reaffirming and, again, helped, was that as long as you know the stuff back home, that's all you need to know.*

The *'know the stuff back home'* relates to Kana's pepeha (tribal introduction), marae, and the mātauranga specific to his whānau, hapū and iwi, which he is already familiar with. His father also reassured Kana that he need not imitate his dramatic performance style as a whaikōrero exponent, as Kana recalls:

> *My stuff boy, is a lot of bullshit, because I like to show off. But as long as you know our kōrero back home, that's all you need to know, and you know that kōrero... it's like, 'ah, yeah, cool. It's easy'.*

Another important piece of advice from Kana's father was, *"it's not how it's done, that's the important thing, it's that it's done. Koina te mea nui (that's important)'.* This perspective encourages Kana to embrace the process of learning and speaking te reo, recognising that gaining experience is a vital part of his growth. It also prompts reflection on whether the high expectations placed upon him are relevant in today's context, especially given the precarious nature of the language. Regardless of the expectations, Kana appreciates his father's guidance, which helps him navigate the anxiety, cultural pressure and expectations surrounding his reo journey.

4. The role of te reo Māori courses

A significant aspect of Kana's reo journey involves part-time reo Māori courses that have boosted both his competence and confidence:

> *I think that was a big shift for me because I went to Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, would have been Te Ara Reo. So, I started at the first one, but again it was a good level for me. What that helped, would really help with my confidence, because in that class, I was like the top of the class, you know. And I pretty much cruised for the first six months, but that built my confidence. What it made me realise, actually, I do know some stuff. I do know more than, I can actually do this, you know, and so where that was important, while I didn't learn a lot (linguistically), it gave me a lot of confidence. It allows you to draw on what you already have, because something's been in front of you, there's been a barrier,*

> *and there's confidence. And so, the course wasn't about developing your grammatical skills, or not necessarily your āwaha (speaking) skills, because the level was probably lower than what your knowledge was, but it was that confidence stuff, and character-building stuff, and affirmations.*

Building confidence and receiving affirmation are essential components of the reo development experience (Te Huia, 2017, 2022, 2023). However, both Kana and his wife Māpihi, feel that an additional year in the same course would have greatly benefited them for language consolidation. Kana expressed:

> *...there are bits that I've gotten better at, but I haven't mastered yet. Yeah, you need to double down, just to consolidate. So, if I had another year at that level to consolidate, that's the level I want to get to (Kana).*

Māpihi agrees, having experienced the anxiety of progressing to a higher reo course before fully mastering her current knowledge.

> *...and that's anxiety-inducing when you're in the wrong class. Your class is too high for you, but you're not allowed to go back down. That's been one of my things when I've been at wānanga and you get put in a group that's too high for you, and you're just drowning. That can be a bit anxiety-inducing when you go to wananga. You're like, which group should I go on? Do I take the easy option where I'm at the top of the class or do I go to one where that's always hard?*

This experience poses challenges for both Māpihi and Kana, potentially derailing their goals in learning te reo.

> *That's one of the challenges too... because I lost count of how many false starts, I've had. Part of that was around not being catered for. And it's a bit like, if I use a sport analogy, you know, you go out, you experience failure, or you blow your engine too early. I don't want to go back to that, you know, or you put it off, you go, nah, I'll just skip this class, and now you're way behind them. I lost count with I guess how many false starts I had, not the tutor's fault or anything, but not having that knowledge to cater for us or feel like you've been left behind (Kana).*

Delivering a supportive learning environment for reo Māori learners is always a challenge for education providers. Learners have diverse needs; some require confidence-building, while others, like Māpihi, need a slower pace. Neither Kana nor Māpihi blame the tutors or the tertiary provider; rather, they critique the tertiary sector's 'bums on seats' funding model (Collins et al., 2016) where providers compete for students.

> *I think one of the challenges now is the funding attached to a lot of these reo courses, it's almost at times like a cattle race where they just push people through... I think that's one of the challenges that we have with the system and the funding system. You've got to turn people through. Yeah, bums on seats (Kana).*

Māpihi shared a similar experience about being 'pushed' into a class that exceeded her competence.

> *And then sometimes if the Kaiako know you, they're like, to me and my mate, you two, up. You know. There's one time I was with Hine and Reece. I was so grateful to them man, because of numbers, we had to go up, because the kaiako knew us, and they're like, you two will be alright. Just go. We were drowning. I had to keep saying, what did they say? You know when it's just all these unfamiliar words and you're like, I am 'ngaro katoa' (completely lost). I don't know what we're doing. It's like a whole new reo. Because you're anxious anyway. You think you're doing alright, eh, and then you lift your head up and you're like, there's so much more to learn (Māpihi).*

Both Māpihi and Kana's experiences highlight the potential pitfalls of a seemingly rushed education system, which can undermine their reo journeys. However, Māpihi acknowledges that these classroom challenges are relatively minor compared to the deeper reo trauma Kana has experienced, particularly in contrast to her own privileged experiences, which is the focus of the next section.

5. Māpihi's experience of language privilege and empathy for Māori

Māpihi's journey with te reo has been largely positive. With fair skin, blonde hair, she was raised primarily by her Pākeha mother after her Māori father passed away when she was young. As a result, people would often assume she was Pākeha. While Māpihi always knew her whakapapa, tūrangawaewae and marae, her family rarely visited, even during her father's lifetime. Despite this disconnect, Māpihi believed that not growing up with the grief and trauma associated with the loss of her reo and Māori identity has been a privilege of sorts.

> *I've been blessed. My reo journey's been really positive. The Wānanga, instrumental, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Safe place to speak... So, you know, you can learn, can't you, when you're not carrying heaps of taumaha (intergenerational burden), and that's why Pākehā and other ethnicities can come in and pick it (te reo Māori) up, because you haven't got all that stuff (historical trauma) weighing you down. You're ready to learn (Māpihi).*

However, Māpihi is aware of the trauma many Māori, like Kana, experience, and she approaches her reo journey with humility.

> *But then what does stop me speaking as much Māori as I would like to is humility. There are Māori that find it so hard to learn, and I don't want to be a 'skite[3]' person, going in and speaking heaps of Māori because, you know, ka patu te whakamā (others feel embarrassed). So sometimes I could be speaking Māori, but I don't, because I don't want to 'takahi (trample) on people's mana' (self-worth) (Māpihi).*

By being mindful of her reo journey, Māpihi practices a form of 'distancing' (Te Huia, 2022) to help alleviate the anxiety or insecurity that less proficient speakers may feel around her. She understands what it's like to be singled out as a reo Māori speaker.

3. A 'skite' is someone who boasts or shows off their ability

> *That was the vibe I got the other day when we were at the marae. I was like, oh yeah, because in our circles, it's a real active process eh, and we all try and speak Māori, and we're all part of it. And then, yeah, these guys were like, "oh yeah, when Māpihi comes, we...", I'm the person that they avoid because they're like, "oh, she's going to speak Māori to us". Rangi made a joke about it. "When it's te reo Māori week we avoid Māpihi". I was like, we're all on our own journey, don't do that. You know, and I mean, I don't even speak Māori hard out to them because I know that they don't. But you know that thing. Well, I don't want to be that guy. I'm trying to uplift it. Yeah. But I'm a threat. Well, you know, it just makes them anxious. Even though I read the room, and I know.*

Māpihi's experience is not uncommon. Well-known reo advocates Stacey and Scotty Morrison (2024) also recognise how learners can feel self-conscious around fluent speakers. Like Rangi in Māpihi's story, Stacey Morrison often feels intimidated and inadequate compared to fluent speakers, a vulnerability that is a normal part of learning te reo. Despite her experiences with Rangi, Māpihi remains committed to normalising te reo in all spaces, especially leveraging her Pākeha appearance.

> *I mean, I've had to work really, really, bloody hard to learn the reo and invest time in it, learning te reo Māori... And then there's that privilege thing too. You know, like, with the kids' sports. I've always made a real active effort, as you know, to speak as much Māori as I can in the community to get it out there and being heard. And so, for that, and that's not why I do it, but people were like, "far out, that's the Pākehā speaking Māori". And because I'm fair-skinned, that privilege, people admire it. I've never had anyone say to me, why are you speaking that for? Ever. So, I've come from a real place of privilege because of how I look with my reo journey (Māpihi).*

Her experience of being recognised as a Pākeha speaking Māori is significant. Albury (2015) argues that language policies related to te reo have a greater chance of success when supported by the dominant culture. Māpihi recognises her position within the dominant group and uses it to support te reo initiatives, challenging the monolingual status of contemporary Aotearoa (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a). In addition to promoting te reo in everyday life, Māpihi, as a trained teacher, is using her profession to reconnect with her hapū by delivering reo classes.

> *So, I'm working with our ones with reo trauma and our hapū that have no reo and find learning reo real hard. And I give back that way. We had a wānanga reo and I just read in the beginner's class. I just do my teaching stuff. And they love it and they're like, "I can learn Māori now". Like Kuia going, "I couldn't even learn our reo and now I can do it". So that's how I can, from my privilege, give back to my people.*

Working within her hapū allows Māpihi to reconnect on a meaningful level, something she missed in her formative years. More importantly, witnessing the joy and increased self-worth of her whānau reinforces her hope for the intergenerational transmission of te reo, a goal she and Kana are actively pursuing.

6. Healing intergenerational trauma

To heal the trauma associated with te reo Māori that Kana has experienced, he and Māpihi are committed to breaking this cycle by educating their children through Kura Māori. Their goal is to ensure the intergenerational transmission of te reo (Crisp, 2005; Fishman, 1991, 2001, 2007). Kana expresses this commitment clearly:

> *I wanted our kids to go through Kohanga, Kura and Wharekura...again, that was a lot to do with my journey. I didn't want my kids to be sitting at the marae like I did at times... I wanted our kids to have the tools... so they could go, ah yeah, I can do this.*

Māpihi echoes his sentiment, emphasising her desire for their children to feel comfortable in their cultural environment.

> *I don't want our kids to be sitting at the marae and go, 'what are they talking about? What are they laughing at? What they say when everyone's laughing?'*

Thanks to Kura Māori, Kana and Māpihi are encouraged by the absence of the trauma their children have experienced so far. However, they do face some challenges, as Māpihi points out.

> *Their reo trauma is more like, "oh, do we have to speak Māori?! Why do we have to speak Māori all the time?! (Māpihi laughs). Why are you guys always hammering us to speak Māori?!*

Such complaints are understandable, especially given the dominance of English in Aotearoa. However, Kana and Māpihi view this as a minor and short-term issue. Their eldest daughter, Mere, now in her second year of university, reflects on her upbringing with newfound appreciation.

> *Mere going into a Western institution and going, "I'm so glad that we've had the upbringing and the reo that we've had I'm so grateful now" (Māpihi).*

Kana and Māpihi are also aware of the saying, "it takes only one generation to lose a language and at least three generations to revive that language" (Ka'ai, 2017, p. 560). Although in their care, they are thinking five generations into the future.

> *I've realised nah nah, we can be the first generation of that five then our kids will be the second and then we've only got three more left and then again that's become a driver for me (Kana)*

Kana has even discussed this with their children, the importance of passing on te reo to their mokopuna. He recalls a conversation he had with them.

> *I've always said this to Māpihi. The one thing I will insist is that the first language they (their children) speak to our mokos is the reo. So, we're coming back from Auckland, and it was just Mere, Puti and I... I said to them, 'darlings you know Pāpā don't ask you fellas to do too much, eh? What I am going to ask is when you fellas have kids, I don't expect it to be too soon, but that the first language you use and the only one is reo'. They both said, "oh nah we're already going to do that Pāpā".*

Kana felt buoyed by their response, joking, "aaah look, my job is done". Māpihi has had similar conversations with their children.

> *...and we've had conversations as well about you know when you guys find partners Māori is preferential you know we would love that and the reo because we've talked about one generation to lose it five to get it back and that's what we said so we've invested heaps in you guys and we don't want to lose that momentum in our whānau we said and with your partner if they're not Māori well then they've got to support kaupapa Māori and reo Māori and be open to that*

Kana and Māpihi are optimistic about the future of te reo Māori within their whānau. They see their children, who are graduates of Kura Māori, as vital contributors to the rebuilding and revitalising of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (Māori customary practices).

7. Summary

Kana and Māpihi's experiences highlight the complexities of reclaiming te reo Māori, balancing cultural identity, and ensuring the survival of te reo Māori within their whānau. Their story is a powerful example of resilience, cultural pride, and the role of education in reversing historical injustices related to language suppression and te reo Māori trauma. Their reflections demonstrate how te reo trauma manifests in both explicit and subtle ways, deeply affecting their relationship with te reo Māori. Despite these challenges, Kana and Māpihi's journeys show that healing is possible through supportive environments, persistence, and a commitment to future generations. By addressing and overcoming this trauma, they are actively reclaiming their reo Māori personally and generationally thereby creating a culturally confident future for themselves and their Tamariki (children).

Sub-Section 2: Eru

Sub-section two focuses on Eru's journey with te reo Māori, highlighting his experiences, challenges, and aspirations related to the preservation and revitalisation of his reo. Eru is 48 years old; works in the health sector and has three children 18 years and older with his partner.

1. Historical context and challenges

In this section, Eru reflects on the intergenerational trauma and challenges faced by his whānau due to colonisation, which has led to a loss of reo among his parents. He also considers the various barriers to reclaiming his reo, including the fear of making mistakes, assimilation, whakamā and lack of support in his home. A significant aspect of Eru's upbringing, like that of many Māori, was the absence of te reo in the home. To provide context, Eru reflects on his parents' experiences which may resonate with other Māori.

> *In terms of my whānau as a whole, we weren't a whānau that was brought up with te reo Māori. Obviously as you'll be aware, my parents were part of that generation that weren't allowed to speak te reo Māori and I guess that just had a channelling effect down to the kids and the rest of us in terms of speaking te reo Māori. Although we attended marae events and went to tangihanga and all that kind of thing, the reo wasn't spoken in our whare. My grandmother spoke te reo Māori, but that wasn't handed down to us, so we didn't have te reo in the home*

When Eru considers why his parents did not speak Māori, he acknowledges that he was not privy to their personal stories. However, they did share insights that reflected the broader experiences of their generation, when speaking te reo Māori was forbidden in schools and corporal punishment was used to enforce this policy (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a).

> *I don't recall my mother or father talking about it. I guess the common theme that they did share was that they were from a generation that got a hiding, got strapped from the teachers of that time if they were to speak te reo Māori or even spoke single words at school, they got a hiding... so, you can understand I guess the trauma that my parents went through and what they wanted for us, what they saw then, they thought that was the right thing, so I guess English was the way to move forward.*

To understand his parents' history with te reo, Eru recalls a traumatic story shared by his mother about his kuia in primary school.

> *One of the stories I recall my mother sharing with me about my kuia who is from up Te Taitokerau. My kuia and her whanaunga were speaking te reo Māori in class and the teacher decided to put my kuia and her whanaunga under the classroom and locked them there till the end of the day. If you knew my kuia, she was very stubborn and ended up digging her way out from under the classroom.... my mother also shared that that's the reason why my tīpuna encouraged the ways of the Pākehā because it was taxing on them.*

The thought of his grandmother being locked under a classroom as a child is a traumatic one for Eru, and he understands why she sought to protect the next generation from similar experiences, even at a cultural cost to the whānau. The impact is now felt in Eru's generation, as he reflects on the absence of te reo is his whānau. When he mentions that his family *'encouraged the ways of the Pākeha',* he reflects on what might be considered minor things like how his parents gave him and his siblings Pākeha names.

> *...everyone knows me as my nickname Eru, but my real name is John, and I guess I always ask my mother, "why did you name me John"? And that was from the Pākehā system that you were going to get nowhere in society if you had a Māori name. My middle name is Mānihera which I love, and I always challenge her, why didn't she name me that first and obviously long story short is that they saw that having a Māori name first was not going to be, I guess you weren't going to be successful moving forward in life I guess education wise.*

The belief that, *'you were going to get nowhere in society if you had a Māori name'* and *'I guess you weren't going to be successful moving forward in life'* echoes sentiments previously expressed by Kana. Eru's parents thought that giving them Pākeha names would reduce barriers to navigating a predominantly Pākeha society.

> *To this day I've got numerous examples when you go somewhere or you go to an event and rather than using your Māori name you think back to your English name and I guess that's part of that trauma that still lives with you because you think if you use Mānihera as opposed to John then you're not going to get anywhere, an example is probably going for a job interview in a certain sector I always used John... but now I'm starting on my reo journey I'm starting to change that and use Mānihera more often, and if that's one of the reasons I don't get selected, then so be it.*

By reasserting his Māori name Mānihera, Eru is reconciling the mana of his whakapapa. Embodying what Seed-Pihama (2019) describes as a form of resistance and decolonisation. Reclaiming Māori names is vital, as Seed-Pihama (2019) notes, because names connect us to important aspects of our cultural identity, including tīpuna and their stories. They remind us that we are part of a rich culture with a strong history of arts, politics, science, navigation and more. Eru has also tried to change this narrative for his own children by giving them Māori names, though this has not been without its challenges, particularly around mispronunciation.

> *We've given him (son) the name Mānihera... and it's been shortened to, Manny... He shortened it to Manny because a lot of people couldn't say Mānihera, and they got it wrong. So here we go again I guess we're trying to fit our Māori names within a Western construct really because people couldn't say it rather than, I guess, flipping that around and educating people on the name... it is draining and time consuming trying to talk about pronunciation and that kind of thing and you've got to sound out the vowels and all that sort of thing.*

The need to teach others how to pronounce Māori names correctly reflects the challenges, or the *'taxing'* part, of being a minority group in Aotearoa. May (2023) describes the alteration of Māori words and names as anglicising the language, where names like Mānihera are simplified to fit English phonetics, becoming Manny instead. The practice of adapting Māori names for easier pronunciation is not uncommon. A well-known example is Te Toiroa Tahuriōrangi, a halfback for the Chiefs and All Blacks, who recognised that people struggled to pronounce his name and didn't mind being referred to as 'Triple T' instead (Te Ao Māori News, 2018). Even Te Toiroa's father understands this adjustment, acknowledging that his Māori name can be challenging to pronounce. The crux of the issue is that Eru, Manny and Triple T, along with their whānau, recognise that correcting pronunciation can be a time-consuming task, so they support their sons' strategies for engaging society. Unfortunately, Eru realises that anglicising Māori names undermines te reo Māori, the very thing he has been trying to resist by giving his children Māori names in the first place.

2. Whakamā, making mistakes and being judged

Reflecting on the moment he first developed an interest in te reo Māori, Eru remembers the bilingual unit at his all-boys college. He was often in awe of the boys who spoke Māori, but he felt too whakamā to join in.

> *My other schoolmates speaking te reo Māori and I used to be blown away and then I always used to say back then, "I wish I could speak te reo Māori"... at the same time opportunities that were put into high school or situations at high school and I would always decline the opportunity... if I was to make a mistake then everyone would laugh at you... kind of whakamā... I had the basics to get up and do a kōrero back then but if you were to make a mistake then you'd know that what comes with it you'd probably get laughed at you'd probably get talked about and "did you hear Eru say... he got it wrong", and all that so my learning at high school was to push it aside because afraid of making a mistake around 'whakamā' (shame)... and I hated being in that kind of situation so I used to generally decline if we had to get up and do a mihi or acknowledgement to somebody in te reo...*

Eru's experience of being whakamā, or lacking confidence and fearing public judgement, is not unique among reo Māori learners (Hamley, 2023; Hashemi, 2011; Horwitz, 1986; Te Huia, 2022). However, years later while enrolled as an adult learner in a Te Wānanga o Aotearoa reo course, he was shocked by what he perceived as being publicly humiliated. This experience led to him to withdraw from the course.

> *...my reo journey started about five years ago. We had the courses at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, and I had a bad experience back then with a particular tutor... If I was to reflect on it, so I knew the word that I knew... If I was to use Ruatoki as an example and they might use a word like 'eroparaina' (aeroplane) which is a transliteration. Then I use those similar words, which is a transliteration, but then get told that's not the correct word to use, "can people in the class help Eru on another word"...to be told that you were wrong, when you felt that you were correct, because the word was correct, but it was just around kupu hou (new words), and all that kind of thing, so then I left that course halfway through the year because of that kind of whakaiti (belittling).*

The use of transliterations is common in everyday te reo Māori conversations, such as the use of moni (money), Mane (Monday), hāmarara (umbrella), motukā (car or motorcar) whutupōro (football or rugby), and ārani (orange the fruit and colour). These transliterations are examples of bilanguaging, a blending of languages and cultures to create something new (Curtis, 2016). In the context of Aotearoa's bi-cultural society, the blending of Pākeha and Māori languages reflects the impact of colonisation. However, Te Taura Whiri I te Reo (Māori Language Commission) has been actively working to create new mātauranga Māori based terms, such as, 'rorohiko' (computer), where 'roro' (brain) and 'hiko' (lightening/electricity) combine to reflect the essence of a computer (Kelly, 2018).

Eru's situation illustrates the conflict between two language paradigms: One that embraces transliterations and another that focuses on creating words that reflect mātauranga Māori perspectives. Whether learners prefer one paradigm over the other, researchers emphasise the importance of creating culturally supportive learning environments that acknowledge the emotional and complex nature of learning te reo Māori (Birnie, 2018; Chrisp, 2005; Te Huia, 2013). These environments must be affirming for Māori learners like Eru.

3. Reigniting the reo journey

Despite the challenges Eru has faced, he has regained his confidence and re-enrolled in another part-time Te Wānanga o Aotearoa reo course. This time, he is joined by his siblings, which has fuelled his passion for learning te reo.

> *I've just picked up a journey again this year... and the good thing about it this year, my siblings, I have my tuākana, my teina and my sister and myself. There's four of us currently in Te Wānanga o Aotearoa doing our reo journey... and my older brother's wife, my sister-in-law... so there's five of us within our family that are on the reo journey... I was to go back 40 years just imagine if we had the reo and the foundation back then what we would be like in today but now what we're having to do is play catch up and it is a struggle it is hard learning the reo because we have to go right back and learn everything as opposed to if we look at Kōhanga reo, Kura Kaupapa you have the foundation built in you from a young kid so it just becomes natural I guess in a sense but it is a struggle learning our language and it's hard because we've got to understand how things fit in and then I guess, yeah grammatically, but then 'reo i te kāinga' (language in the home) what I've found too is different to learning reo in the classroom in a grammatical sense and so yeah so we're having to I guess put those kind of things together and I know that me and my siblings we find it hard but we're glad we're on the journey and we started to get a little bit of that mātauranga and I guess the tools to help us to move forward*

While the reo course has rekindled Eru's enthusiasm, he still struggles with feeling unsupported at home, especially when he returns from class, energised to speak te reo Māori.

> *...so when I get home and I walk through the door I start speaking te reo Māori which is brilliant, but then on the flip side, so just to be noted that my wahine is fluent in te reo, all my kids are fluent in te reo, so I walk through the door and I start speaking te reo Māori the response I get back from my whānau is like, "oh he's been to his te reo Māori class, here we go", and then I guess the negative is it kind of deflates me.*

Eru recognises that speaking te reo Māori at home is vital, not just for him, but for the collective learning process within his whānau. He understands that language learning isn't an isolated cognitive process; it thrives through shared conversations, mistakes, and development (Ratima & May, 2011). Drawing on the concept of a community of practice (Wenger, 2000), learning happens when people with common interests engage in regular, collaborative interactions. Eru believes his whānau could serve as a community of practice, but he feels they need to become more active participants in his reo journey.

4. Decolonising the mindset

Another challenge Eru faces is what he refers to as decolonising his mindset, shifting from a habit of thinking in English and translating his thoughts into te reo Māori. This cognitive process is a barrier to effective communication.

> *...decolonising I guess my mindset, my mindset to shift from a colonised space back into I guess this te ao Māori and I look at it from, what is it, 'te ao, te pō, ki te whaeao, ki te ao Mārama' so from moving over this space and it's hard and the only reason why I talk about decolonising it because since I've been on the reo journey my mindset thinks Pākehā first and then tries to translate it to reo Māori which is the wrong thing to do*

Eru's struggle mirrors a common challenge in second language acquisition, L1 interference, where features of one's native language (L1) influence the learning of a second language (L2) (Nosova, 2024; Schmid & Köpke, 2019). This interference can result in grammatical errors, or difficulty in finding the right words when trying to translate directly from English to Māori. Recognising that his English-language habits interfere with his reo Māori learning has helped Eru understand the difficulties he faces and shift his mindset accordingly.

> *I've learnt a lot more in the last six months than I have in my whole reo journey, and it's been massive. Our kaiako is awesome but it's shifted our mindset from a colonised and trying to decolonise and put us into a space where we don't think Pākehā, think Māori first and it's been a mean shift*

Eru's efforts at decolonising his mindset extend to his role within his whānau. Initially hesitant to speak on the paepae, Eru would often use the tuakana-teina relationship as an excuse to avoid public speaking. However, after a conversation with his kaumātua, he realised this was just an excuse to avoid making mistakes.

> *...and the other thing we talk here a lot about is tuakana teina (older/younger sibling dynamic). I use that as an excuse. I'll go back to tangi a lot, and I'll acknowledge the 'paepae' and say look I don't speak my tuakana's (older sibling) here. Until one of our kaumātua from home sat me down and said you've got to stop using that as an excuse and as soon as he said that he was right. I was just using the tuakana/teina, as an excuse not to mihi and stand up because of, I guess, making mistakes. 'Tērā tūmomo ahuatanga ki te hapa' (afraid of making mistakes), but what we do know if we don't make mistakes in those environments where's the learning that happens within that space. So, I've learnt a lot about that, and I've accepted that challenge... these days I'm preparing myself a lot more to go to that tangihanga not expecting a speaker to be there, so those kinds of things have flipped on its head.*

5. Summary

In summary, Eru's reo journey highlights his relationship with te reo Māori amidst historical and personal trauma and challenges. Growing up, Eru experienced a significant absence of te reo in his home, a result of intergenerational trauma linked to colonisation. Eru recalls feeling the trauma of whakamā (shame) during his school years and adult language courses, which discouraged him from speaking te reo. Despite these setbacks, Eru is committed to reclaiming his reo and cultural identity by embracing his Māori name, instilling the importance of te reo in his children and continuing with reo courses. His insights underscore the significance of supportive environments, positive reinforcement, and ongoing learning to overcome barriers and achieve language proficiency.

4

Section 4: Discussion

The aim of this report was to explore the personal experiences of Māori who suffer from te reo Māori trauma as defined by Roa and Roa (2023), as well as the nature and origins of these traumatic experiences. In this section of the report, a review of the key issues raised by Kana, Māpihi and Eru will be considered to compliment the analysis of their individual cases.

The first theme pertains to individual experiences, encompassing the personal journeys of the three Kaikōrero as they navigate the process of reclaiming te reo Māori. This journey was often characterised by emotional and psychological challenges, including feelings of inadequacy, whakamā (embarrassment), and self-doubt. Such emotional states were frequently compounded by cultural expectations that demand high levels of linguistic proficiency, which led to internal conflicts regarding the authenticity of their identity as Māori. These experiences highlight the tension between cultural aspirations and individual capacities, underscoring the importance of creating supportive learning environments. The three Kaikōrero therefore advocate for spaces that view mistakes as integral to language acquisition, fostering resilience and confidence in reo revitalisation.

The second theme in this section addresses collective and intergenerational dimensions of te reo trauma. Here, the focus shifts from individual narratives to the broader societal context, emphasising the need for a collective response to healing that transcends an individual focus. Recognizing te reo Māori trauma as a shared cultural issue underscores the importance of collective resilience and intergenerational support systems. It challenges the tendency to pathologise trauma solely at an individual level, advocating instead for approaches that incorporate community-based healing, cultural revitalisation, and intergenerational transmission of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (Māori language, values and customs). By framing trauma within a collective context, a holistic understanding of language loss and revitalisation as both a personal and communal journey toward cultural resurgence and identity restoration might occur.

1. Emotional, psychological, and social distress, and fluid identity

Psychological barriers: Fear of making mistakes and being judged

The journey of learning te reo Māori for many learners, like Kana, Māpihi and Eru, has meant grappling with profound fears of making mistakes and being judged, which undermines their self-esteem and confidence. This anxiety creates psychological barriers that have hindered engagement and participation in te reo and Māori cultural practices. For Kana, the fear of being corrected initially led him to avoid speaking altogether, as he felt inferior compared to more proficient speakers. Kana felt uncomfortable making mistakes given cultural and societal expectations placed on proficiency, transforming his reo Māori experience into one of stress rather than enjoyment.

Eru's experiences mirror Kana's, highlighting a sense of whakamā (shame) that many learners feel. In High School for instance, Eru admired his reo speaking peers but felt too self-conscious to join in, in case he was judged and teased. Eru also experienced a humiliating incident during an adult learning course which added fuel to his fears, leading him to withdraw from that class. Despite these challenges, Kana's immersion in a supportive Wharekura environment proved transformative. Surrounded by the reo daily and encouraged by kaiako like Matua Kiwa, who adapted his reo to meet the level of Kana, Kana began to confront his fear and anxieties and recognise that making mistakes is a normal part of the learning process. Eru too learned to embrace the inevitability of mistakes, and he has become more diligent in preparing for opportunities to use his reo, signifying an increase in confidence.

The experiences of Kana and Eru underscore the critical need for culturally supportive learning environments that recognise and validate the emotional challenges of learning te reo Māori. Researchers emphasise the need for spaces that encourage the acceptance of mistakes as an integral part of te reo learning process. Society should be celebrating progress, no matter how small, and cultivating an environment that is understanding and accepting of learner experiences that can help dismantle the barriers of fear, judgment and shame.

Cultural expectations to be proficient in te reo Māori

Many learners of te reo Māori can experience significant anxiety when they feel pressured to be proficient speakers in te reo and or highly competent in cultural practices such as whaikōrero (oratory). This expectation can be daunting for those who are still in the early stages of their reo journey. The weight of these expectations can often lead to a sense of inadequacy and self-doubt, as learners like Kana, compare themselves to proficient speakers like Kana's father. The ability to speak te reo and participate in cultural practices is deeply tied to their sense of identity as Māori. When Kana and Eru perceive themselves as lacking these cultural skills, it fostered feelings of shame and inadequacy, reducing opportunities to practice or engage conversation and cultural practices.

Engagement in Learning

Kana and Eru's experiences highlight the critical need for educational environments that foster confidence, embrace mistakes and nurture the anxieties reo learners experience within the context of learning te reo Māori. Eru's narrative complements Kana's and Māpihi's, as they all highlight the importance of te reo Māori courses, but they can also be a source of stress, as Eru experienced when he felt publicly humiliated, which led him to withdraw from a course.

Despite the number of 'false starts' in reo courses, Kana and Eru have both returned to the classroom. A critical part of Eru's reo classroom journey involves decolonising his mindset, transitioning from thinking in English to adopting a Māori perspective in his language learning. Acknowledging L1 interference has been an important cognitive shift for Eru and allowed him to better understand the difficulty he was experiencing in speaking te reo Māori.

Both Kana and Māpihi emphasise the importance of reo courses that also prioritise individual learner needs over the education system's focus on rapid progression and the 'bums on seats' funding model. The current funding model puts pressure on reo learners to progress quicker that their capabilities allow, further entrenching feelings of inadequacy. Kana, Māpihi and Eru's experiences also serve as vital reminders of the need for educational practices that not only promote te reo Māori proficiency but also nurture the emotional and psychology well-being of learners.

Shaping a contemporary Māori identity

Lastly, a complex issue was raised by all three Kaikōrero around being Māori and whether te reo Māori is the primary marker of their Māori identity. Earlier in the report the notion of a 'fixed Māori identity' (Te Huia, 2023) was raised which posits that te reo Māori was a necessary marker to the authenticity of one's identity as Māori. Drawing on whakatauki and insights by people like Sir Timoti Karetu it was clear to see the logic of this argument. However, a fixed Māori identity is seen as problematic for several key reasons, for instance, it excludes a large portion of the Māori population, most of whom lack proficiency in te reo Māori (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2024; Te Whata, 2024a). If te reo Māori is positioned as a primary marker for being Māori, then statistically speaking, most Māori would be excluded from their own identity. This exclusion can intensify feelings of disconnection, self-esteem and shame. A fixed Māori identity also fails to reflect the lived realities of Māori today because of colonisation, since Māori did not willingly choose to lose their reo and culture, it was forcibly removed through systemic and racist colonial policies and practices. A fixed identity can inadvertently ignore this history and why some Māori may or may not have te reo today. A fixed identity also reduces Māori identity to a checklist of cultural traits, which can be harmful since it places the onus of individuals to prove themselves to other Māori and society more broadly. This checklist of traits can then be a cause of tension within Māori communities, where some Māori feel more entitled to engage Māori cultural activities, simply because they have met some standards. However, Māori identity is a lot more complex, dynamic and fluid. A fluid Māori identity as argued by McIntosh (Te Huia, 2023) acknowledges the diverse realities, histories, and lived experiences of Māori in a contemporary society. Many Māori express their identity in a range of ways including performing arts, music, political activism, scholarship or sport that may not align with markers of a fixed identity. A fluid Māori identity also takes into account the multiple ethnic identities Māori can claim, for example, in 2013, 43.5% of Māori claimed to have both Māori and Pākeha ethnicities with a small number of Māori (3.8%) claiming Māori and Pasifika descent (Kukutai & Webber, 2017). In 2018, 46.1% of Māori identified with two ethnic groups and 6% of Māori claimed three ethnic groups (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2018).

These statistics highlight the complexity of Māori identities in a multicultural society where many Māori claim various cultural heritages to shape their sense of self. A fluid identity also shifts the focus away from an 'authentic' checklist of characteristics to one of connection through whakapapa and community engagement as valid expressions of being Māori. This helps reduce gatekeeping and internalised shame many Māori can experience when they may not 'live up' to a fixed standard (Houkamau, 2010; Kukutai et al., 2013; Kukutai & Webber, 2017; Penetito, 2011; Te Huia, 2017, 2023). Whether one advocates a fixed or fluid approach to identity is almost beside the point; what matters is that being Māori today is complex and constantly subject to negotiation.

2. Collective aspects and Whānau strategies in the face of reo trauma

Intergenerational impacts of language suppression

The intergenerational impacts of te reo Māori suppression where there was an absence of te reo Māori in the upbringings of Kana, Māpihi and Eru highlight the broader historical factors of colonisation and Crown policies that have contributed to the decline of te reo Māori within their whānau. Both Kana and Eru were raised in households where te reo Māori was not spoken and their experiences reflect broader statistical trends, with only 18% of Māori reporting the ability to hold a conversation in te reo (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2024; Te Whata, 2024a). The reason why Kana and Eru in particular lacked te reo in their household was often attributed to the trauma experienced by their parents' generation, who were punished in schools for speaking te reo Māori (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2011a). This meant many Māori parents either grew up without the reo, withheld the reo from their children, or discouraged the reo to avoid passing on their trauma to the next generation. Many also believed that te reo Pākeha was more advantageous in a Pākehā-dominated society compared to te reo. For example, Kana's father explicitly stated that he believed teaching te reo Māori to Kana and his siblings was a "waste of fucking time" echoing colonial ideologies that rendered the language irrelevant. Such beliefs are reinforced by contemporary public discourse that questions the relevance and utility of te reo within contemporary society (Hauiti, 2023; Hosking, 2018; Ngapo, 2013). The emotional consequences of te reo Māori loss and trauma have also been profound. When Kana discovered his father's fluency, he expressed a deep sense of cultural loss and resentment, that made him question the legitimacy of his own Māori identity due to his lack of reo proficiency. Similarly, Eru reflects on his parents' choice to give himself and his siblings Pākeha names as a strategic way to reduce preconceived barriers in a society. For instance, the decision to prioritise the name 'John' rather than his other name Mānihera was on the understanding that Mānihera as a Māori name, might hinder educational and professional pathways. Although Eru has named his son Mānihera, as a form of cultural reclamation, he acknowledges the ongoing difficulties associated with name mispronunciation. Eru's son Mānihera has now become 'Manny', a form of anglicisation, which reflects the linguistic dominance of te reo Pākeha (May, 2023).

Systemic approaches required to address te reo Māori trauma

Given the intergenerational impact of language suppression, this report argues that te reo Māori trauma is relational in nature, and efforts to reduce and eliminate te reo Māori trauma need to be systemic rather than individually focused initiatives. A comprehensive approach that engages whānau, hapū, iwi, communities, institutions, and governmental bodies is critical for effective and sustained efforts that reverberate through the generations. More importantly, Māori communities must lead initiatives at every stage, supported by wider systemic access to resources and support. The concept of a Community of Practice (Wenger, 2000), offers a framework for addressing te reo Māori trauma, where communities of individuals with similar interests, common purpose and knowledge engage in collective learning and interaction. Communities of practice creates sites of collaboration, where people can unite around their shared interest in te reo Māori. Communities of practice is a relational and interconnected environment, where individuals can engage in practices of collective healing. Examples of communities of practice include Kohanga Reo and Kura Māori where collective efforts toward te reo revitalisation occur. Kura Māori for all three Kaikōrero, counters the disconnection that can arise from intergenerational loss of reo where their children, and the next generation of Māori children, are equipped with the cultural tools to reclaim their reo and share it with future generations. In this way, the revitalisation of te reo Māori and ultimately the elimination of te reo Māori trauma becomes a shared journey.

5

Section 5: Concluding Comments

The purpose of this small-scale research project was to gain an understanding of te reo Māori trauma for people in their everyday cultural and social context. The small sample size and subsequent findings are not intended to be generalisable to the larger population, but the Kaikōrero do provide a localised understanding of events that give rise to the broader historical context of reo trauma; the everyday manifestation of te reo trauma and how that might contribute to experiences of whakamā, anxiety and frustration. Also, the strategies Kaikōrero used to resist and overcome the experiences of te reo Māori trauma.

The stories of Kaikōrero highlighted the complexities of reclaiming te reo Māori, and embedding te reo into their everyday lives, ensuring its survival for future generations. They all spoke to how te reo trauma manifests in a variety of ways both explicit and subtle, deeply affecting their relationship with the reo and their sense of self as culturally Māori. Kaikōrero spoke about regaining reo as an ongoing journey with bumps along the way but the importance of the reo to their cultural sense of self and the role they want to play in revitalising the reo as a living and vibrant language. Kaikōrero reflected upon the systemic challenges faced within their lives and Māori communities generally in learning te reo, whilst shedding light on the importance of education and empowerment at an individual and systemic level in embracing and preserving te reo Māori.

Kaikōrero highlighted the significance of supportive environments, positive reinforcement, and ongoing learning to overcome barriers, and ensure future generations can develop a stronger connection to te reo Māori compared with previous generations. They discussed how overcoming trauma and healing is possible by actively reclaiming their reo Māori at an individual level but also for these Kaikōrero, it meant putting their children through Kura Māori where a culturally confident future for their children might be created. Kaikōrero were clear that education has a primary role in reversing the historical injustices of the suppression of te reo Māori. Although Kaikōrero gave powerful stories of te reo Māori trauma, they also exhibited expressions of resilience and cultural pride.

Mātauranga Hou

The 'working definition' of te reo Māori trauma articulated by Roa and Roa (2023) provides a crucial foundation for understanding the complexities associated with trauma and its impact on individuals' engagement with te reo Māori. As a reminder, their definition characterises te reo Māori trauma as "...referring to a person's emotional, psychological, spiritual distress, and/or physical injury caused by harmful events or by association with harmful events, which directly impacts their ability and/or willingness to learn and/or speak te reo Māori" (Roa & Roa, 2023, p. 4). While their focus emphasises individual experiences, Roa and Roa (2023) acknowledge that an individualistic perspective risks oversimplifying the inherently communal nature of language, which is deeply rooted in collective identity and shared histories (Fishman, 2007).

They also highlight a range of factors influencing te reo Māori trauma, including historical and intergenerational trauma, as well as socio-economic and political elements. Recognising the collective dimension of Māori language trauma, they stress the importance of acknowledging individual suffering alongside broader Māori experiences of loss, which have significant societal and intergenerational implications, as evidenced by Kaikōrero in this report. The primary purpose of their working definition was to clarify the concept of te reo Māori trauma within scholarly and practical discussions. Roa and Roa (2023) also note that their definition is not intended as a diagnostic tool and that it would be inappropriate to assume that difficulties in learning or speaking te reo Māori automatically indicate trauma. This acknowledgment highlights a limitation within the current literature and suggests avenues for future research.

Furthermore, Roa and Roa (2023) emphasise the significance of 'healing through collaboration', advocating for collective efforts among health, education, and media sectors to facilitate healing from trauma. While this current project concurs with the importance of collaborative approaches, we aim to extend and build upon Roa and Roa's (2023) work by proposing a pathway that prioritises whānau and emphasises intergenerational sustainability. This approach seeks to centre the whānau and foster long-term language revitalisation using a bottom-up/grassroots approach, offering a potentially more effective strategy for addressing te reo Māori trauma.

References

Albury, N. J. (2015). Collective (white) memories of Māori language loss (or not). *Language Awareness, 24*(4), 303–315. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658416.2015.1111899

Albury, N. J. (2016). Defining Māori language revitalisation: A project in folk linguistics. *Journal of Sociolinguistics, 20*(3), 287–311. https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12183

Albury, N. J., & Carter, L. (2018). "An unrealistic expectation": Māori youth on indigenous language purism. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 2018*(254), 121–138. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2018-0036

Birnie, J. (2018). *Exploring learner-centredness for adults learning te reo Māori: easing the path to language acquisition* [PhD, The University of Otago]. Dunedin.

Burne-Field, S. (2021, May 2). This doesn't make us less. *E-Tangata*. https://e-tangata.co.nz/reo/this-doesnt-make-us-less/

Busbridge, R. (2016). Between continuity and change: Contemporary indigenous identities and Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. *International Sociology, 31*(5), 515–524. https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580916655752

Campbell, M. (2025). Beating the taniwha of shame. *E-Tangata*. https://e-tangata.co.nz/reo/beating-the-taniwha-of-shame/?utm_source=instagram&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=12May2025

Chrisp, S. (2005). Māori intergenerational language transmission. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 2005(172)*, 149–181. https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2005.2005.172.149

Collins, F. L., Lewis, N., Collins, C. S., Neubauer, D. E., Lee, M. N. N., & Hawkins, J. N. (2016). New Zealand Universities: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Globalizing Higher Education. In C. S. Collins & M. N. N. H. Lee, John N Neubauer, Deane E (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Asia Pacific Higher Education* (pp. 597–613). Palgrave Macmillan US. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48739-1_39

Crisp, S. (2005). Māori intergenerational language transmission. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language(172)*, 149–181. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2005.2005.172.149

Curtis, M. (2016). Nga Toikupu o Nga Reo Taharua: e Takiri ana te Aroa Panui/ The Poetics of Bilanguaging: an Unfurling Literacy. *Ka mate Ka ora: a New Zealand Journal of Poetry and Poetics, 14*, 70–94.

Darder, A. (1991). *Culture and power in the classroom: a critical foundation for bicultural education*. Bergin & Garvey.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). Methods of Collecting Data and Analyzing Empirical Materials. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Material* (2nd ed., pp. 47–60). SAGE Publications.

Department of Corrections. (2023). *Prison facts and statistics – March 2023*. Retrieved 3 April, 2024 from https://www.corrections.govt.nz/resources/statistics/quarterly_prison_statistics/prison_stats_march_2023

Durie, A. (1997). Te Aka Matua: Keeping a Maori identity. In P. Te Whāiti, M. B. McCarthy, & A. Durie (Eds.), *Mai i Rangiātea: Māori wellbeing and development*. (pp. 142–162). Auckland University Press.

Durie, M. (1994). *Whaiora: Māori Health Development*. Oxford University Press.

Durie, M. (2001). *Mauri ora: the dynamics of Māori health*. Oxford University Press.

Durie, M. (2002). Is there a distinctive Maori psychology? In L. W. Nikora, M. Levy, B. Masters, W. Waitoki, N. Te Awekotuku, & R. Etheredge (Eds.), *The Proceedings fo the National Maori Graduates of Psychology Symposium 2002: Making a Difference* (pp. 19–25). Maori & Psychology Research Unit.

Durie, M. (2004). An Indigenous model of health promotion. *Indigenous Health Promotion, 15*(3), 181–185.

Fishman, J. (1991). *Reversing language shift: theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Multilingual Matters.

Fishman, J. (2001). *Can threatened languages be saved? reversing language shift, revisited: a 21st century perspective*. Multilingual Matters.

Fishman, J. (2007). What do you lose when you lose a language? In G. Cantoni (Ed.), *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* (2nd ed., pp. 71–81). North Arizona University.

Gagné, N. (2013). *Being Māori in the City: indigenous everyday life in Auckland*. University of Toronto Press.

Hamley, L. (2023). Intergenerational Affect, Language Trauma, and Pride: Young Māori Men's Emotional Experiences of Te Reo Māori. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education,* 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2023.2281955

Hashemi, M. (2011). Language Stress And Anxiety Among The English Language Learners. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences,* 30, 1811–1816. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.10.349

Hauiti, C. (2023). Limit te reo classes for teachers says Seymour. *WaateaNews.Com*. https://waateanews.com/2023/12/07/limit-te-reo-classes-for-teachers-says-seymout/

Higgins, R., Rewi, P., & Olsen-Reeder, V. (2014). *The Value of the Māori Language: Te Hua o te Reo Māori*. Huia Publishers.

Hokowhitu, B., & Devadas, V. (2013). *The Fourth Eye: Maori Media in Aotearoa New Zealand* (1st ed.). University of Minnesota Press.

Hond-Flavell, E., Theodore, R., Treharne, G. J., Tamati, A., Edwards, W., Poulton, R., Hond, R., & Ratima, M. (2021). Tangi te Kawekaweā: whānau engagement in Kaupapa Māori early years provision – an exploratory qualitative study. *MAI Journal, 10*(1), 3–16. https://doi.org/10.20507/MAIJournal.2021.10.1.1

Horwitz, E. K. (1986). Preliminary Evidence for the Reliability and Validity of a Foreign Language Anxiety Scale. *TESOL Quarterly, 20*(3), 559–562. https://doi.org/10.2307/3586302

Hosking, M. (2018). The trouble with te reo Maori is a lack of relevance. *The New Zealand Herald*. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/mike-hosking-the-trouble-with-te-reo-maori-is-a-lack-of-relevance/IU4U2ARJCZJAVSPKNBTP7UV6PU/

Houia, W. (2002). An Analysis of Typical Errors of Young Learners of Te Reo Maori. *He Puna Kōrero: Journal of Maori and Pacific Development, 3*(1), 44–72.

Houkamau, C. A. (2010). Identity construction and reconstruction: the role of socio-historical contexts in shaping Māori women's identity. *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture, 16*(2), 179–196. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504631003688872

Hutchings, J., Higgins, R., Bright, N., Keane, B., Olsen-Reeder, V., Hunia, M., Lee, J., Morgan, E., Martin, J., Fong, S. H., Emery, W., Black, T., Edwards, H., Hammond, K., Te Aika, L.-H. r., Wylie, C., Felgate, R., & Kearns, R. (2017). *Te Ahu o Te Reo: te reo Māori in homes and communities: overview report = he tirohanga whānui*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Ka'ai-Mahuta, R. (2011a). The impact of colonisation on te reo Māori: A critical review of the State education system. *Te Kaharoa, 4*(1), 195–225. https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v4i1.117

Ka'ai-Mahuta, R. (2011b). The impact of colonisation on te reo Māori: A critical review of the State education system. *Te Kaharoa, 4*(1). https://doi.org/10.24135/tekaharoa.v4i1.117

Ka'ai, T. M. (2017). Great-grandfather, please teach me my language. *Multilingua, 36*(5), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-3044

Kelly, H. (2018). A Tradition of Māori Translation. Neke. *The New Zealand Journal of Translation Studies, 1*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.26686/neke.v1i1.4861

Kelly, J. (2017). The performance of whaikōrero. *MAI Journal, 6*(2), 189–196.

Kukutai, T. (2004). The problem of defining an ethnic group for public policy: who is Maori and why does it matter? *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand*(23), 86–108.

Kukutai, T., Andersen, C., & Peters, E. (2013). The Structure of Urban Māori Identities. In E. Peters & C. Andersen (Eds.), *Indigenous in the City* (pp. 311–333). University of British Columbia Press. https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774824668-020

Kukutai, T., & Webber, M. (2017). Ka Pu Te Ruha, Ka Hao Te Rangatahi: Māori Identities in the Twenty-First Century. In A. Bell, V. Elizabeth, T. McIntosh, & M. Wynyard (Eds.), *A Land of Milk and Honey? Making Sense of Aotearoa New Zealand* (pp. 71–82). Auckland University Press.

Lee, J. (2009). Decolonising Māori narratives: pūrākau as a method. *MAI Review*(2).

Lyons, E. (2003). Qualitative Data Analysis: Data Display Model. In G. M. Breakwell, S. Hammond, & C. Fife-Schaw (Eds.), *Research Methods in Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 269–280). SAGE Publications Ltd.

May, S. (2023). New Zealand is "racist as fk": Linguistic racism and te reo Māori. *Ethnicities, 23*(5), 662–679. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968231192037

McIntosh, T., & Workman, K. (2017). Māori and Prison. In A. Deckert & R. Sarre (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Australian and New Zealand Criminology, Crime and Justice* (pp. 725–735). Springer International Publishing AG. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55747-2_48

Mead, S. M. (2013). *Tikanga Maori Living by Maori Values*. Huia NZ Ltd. https://doi.org/EBL1359704

Ministry of Health. (2024a). *Health and Independence Report 2023 – Te Pūrongo mō te Hauora me te Tū Motuhake 2023*. Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health. (2024b). *Tatau Kahukura: Māori Health Chart Book 2024* (4th ed.). Ministry of Health.

Morrison, S. (2024, 15 Sept). 'Please don't be embarrassed about using te reo Māori around me'. *RNZ*. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/528052/stacey-morrison-please-don-t-be-embarrassed-about-using-te-reo-maori-around-me

Ngapo, K. (2013). 'Mainstreaming' Te Reo Māori: Beyond Indifference and Tokenism in the Classroom. *Kairaranga, 14*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.54322/kairaranga.v14i1.174

Nielson, M. (2020, 14 September). Beaten for speaking their native tongue, and the generations that suffered. *The NZ Hearld*. https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/te-wiki-o-te-reo-maori-beaten-for-speaking-their-native-tongue-and-the-generations-that-suffered/F7G6XCM62QAHTYVSRVOCRKAUYI/

Nosova, I. (2024). Mitigating L1 interference: Innovative tools and strategies. *EA Journal, 40*(1), 46–50. https://doi.org/10.61504/QFme6365

Penetito, W. (2011). Kaupapa Māori Education: Research as the Exposed Edge. In J. Hutchings, H. Potter, & K. Taupo (Eds.), *Kei Tua o Te Pae hui proceedings: The Challenges of Kaupapa Māori Research in the 21st Century* (pp. 38–43). New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

Rameka, L. (2018). A Māori perspective of being and belonging. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 19(4), 367–378. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463949118808099

Ratima, M., & May, S. (2011). A review of indigenous second language acquisition: factors leading to proficiency in te reo Māori (the Māori language). *MAI Review(1)*, 1–21.

Rewi, P. (2013). *Whaikorero*. Auckland University Press.

Roa, R., & Roa, T. (2023). *Te Reo Māori Trauma: A literature review prepared for Te Mātāwai*. Te Mātāwai.

Schmid, M. S., & Köpke, B. (2019). *The Oxford handbook of language attrition*. Oxford University Press.

Seed-Pihama, J. (2019). Naming our names and telling our stories. In L. T. Smith, J. Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, J. Lee-Morgan, & J. D. Santolo (Eds.), *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork As Methodology* (1 ed., pp. 107–119). Bloomsbury Academic & Professional.

Sibley, C. G., Houkamau, C. A., & Zárate, M. A. (2013). The Multi-Dimensional Model of Māori Identity and Cultural Engagement: Item Response Theory Analysis of Scale Properties. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology, 19*(1), 97–110. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0031113

Simmel, G. (1997). The metropolis and mental life. In D. Frisby & M. Featherstone (Eds.), *Simmel on culture : selected writings* (pp. 174–185). Sage.

Smith, L. T. (1989). Te reo Māori: Māori language and the struggle to survive. *ACCESS, 8*, 3–9.

Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2001). *2001 Survey on the Health of the Māori Language*. https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/2001-survey-on-the-health-of-the-maori-language/

Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2018). *Māori Ethnic Group*. Retrieved 16 April from https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-ethnic-group-summaries/māori/

Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2020). *Te Kupenga: 2018*. Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa. Retrieved 28 May, 2024 from https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/te-kupenga-2018-final-english/

Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2021). Te *Pā Harakeke: Māori housing and wellbeing 2021*. Retrieved 3 April from https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/te-pa-harakeke-maori-housing-and-wellbeing-2021/

Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa. (2024). *2023 Census population counts (by ethnic group, age, and Māori descent) and dwelling counts*. https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/2023-census-population-counts-by-ethnic-group-age-and-maori-descent-and-dwelling-counts/

Te Ao Māori News. (2018). Triple T not offended when it comes to his name. *Te Ao Māori News*. https://www.teaonews.co.nz/2018/05/03/triple-t-not-offended-when-it-comes-to-his-name/

Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand. (1988). *Te reo Māori – the Māori language: Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori*. Retrieved 2 May from https://teara.govt.nz/en/video/41077/ko-te-reo-te-mauri-o-te-mana-maori

Te Huia, A. (2013). *Whāia te iti kahurangi, ki te tuohu koe me he maunga teitei: Establishing psychological foundations for higher levels of Māori language proficiency* [Ph.D., Victoria University of Wellington]. Wellington.

Te Huia, A. (2015). Kia aha te Maori kia Maori ai? Perspectives towards Maori identity by Maori heritage language learners. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology (Online), 44*(3), 18.

Te Huia, A. (2017). Exploring the Role of Identity in Māori Heritage Language Learner Motivations. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 16*(5), 299–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2017.1319282

Te Huia, A. (2022). Language Anxiety of Colonial Settler Group Members Learning an Indigenous Language: Pākehā Learners of te reo Māori. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education, 21*(4), 217–230. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2020.1791709

Te Huia, A. (2023). *He Reo Tuku Iho: Tangata Whenua and Te Reo Maori*. Victoria University Press.

Te Huia, A., & Madder, F. (n.d.). *He whānau reo Māori: Me pēwhea rā? A literature review prepared for Te Mātāwai*. Te Mātāwai. https://www.tematawai.maori.nz/assets/Research-Reports/WEB2-Te-Maaetaaewai-Lit-Review-v6.pdf

Te Whata. (2024a). *Census 2023 Release: te reo usage*. Retrieved 29 November from https://tewhata.io/all-maori/cultural/matauranga/te-reo-usage/#language

Te Whata. (2024b). *Home Ownership*. Retrieved 3 April from https://tewhata.io/all-maori/social/housing/home-ownership/

Tocker, K. (2007). Kura Kaupapa Maori Experiences. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 42*(1/2), 65–76.

UNESCO. (2024). *World Atlas of Languages*. Retrieved 28 May, 2024 from https://en.wal.unesco.org/countries/new-zealand

Waitangi Tribunal. (2011). *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei – a Report into Claims Concerning New Zealand Law and Policy Affecting Māori Culture and Identity. Legislation Direct*.

Walker, R. (1990). *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou, Struggle Without End*. Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd.

Warren, K. T. (2017). Te Reo Māori: analysing the colonial history of the native Māori language of Aotearoa (New Zealand). *Educação e Revitalização Linguísticas, 13*(1), 349–366.

Webber, M. (2012). Identity matters: Racial-ethnic identity and Maori students. Set: *Research Information for Teachers*(2), 20–27. https://doi.org/10.18296/set.0370

Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems. *Organization, 7*(2), 225–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840072002

Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1993). *Mapping the language of racism: discourse and the legitimation of exploitation*. Columbia University Press.

Williams, K. (2024, 29 May). Ko te reo te take [Interview]. https://www.facebook.com/reel/382971540814556; Te Māngai Pāho https://www.facebook.com/reel/382971540814556. https://www.facebook.com/reel/382971540814556

Kia ūkaipō anō te reo

temātāwai.māori.nz