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Hawke's Bay
TODAY

Dr Germana Nicklin: Oranga Tamariki - what's in a name?

By Dr Germana Nicklin



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What is striking about the new agency Oranga Tamariki/Ministry for Vulnerable Children is the difference in meaning between the Maori and English versions of the name.

The Maori name means the wellbeing of children (implication = 'all children'); the English name is about vulnerable children.

I cannot help but foresee this difference playing out badly. Think of the Tiriti o Waitangi and despair. What was the Government thinking?

Why is challenging the English version of the name important? A name tells a story and humans love stories. We connect to them emotionally - they stir us and motivate us to act. What we do then tells its own story.

the meaning people make of the name of the new agency will influence their behaviour and that behaviour will have a flow-on effect.

The story of the Maori version of the name could go something like this: "New Zealand cares about its children, who are the future of the nation."

This agency is about ensuring that the wellbeing of New Zealand's children is a priority for Government".

The head of the new agency has herself said that children are at the centre of the agency's work. The omission of any reference to ministry or agency in the name also implies a more societal approach to its work - not just the responsibility of this government agency, but of all society. Not much to argue with there.

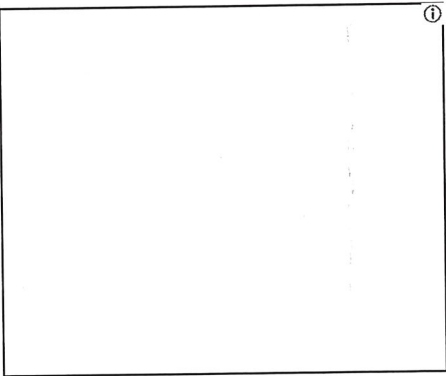
Compare this with the English version, in which the story is situated quite differently. First is the word "Ministry", clearly placing the agency in the domain of government. Second is the qualifier "vulnerable". Quite a narrowing of focus.

Child welfare expert Dr Emily Keddell, in an interview about the new agency, made the following comment: "this can exclude from the Ministry's remit . . . the broader context that parenting happens within" (The Spinoff, April 2, 2017).

This is worrying, given the known connections between inequality, poverty and families under stress. Inequality is a societal problem, not an individual family one.

The Commissioner for Children has already spoken out about the different meanings, and has said he will only use the Maori name. But, you might say, the two names are side by side, so they could be read as complementary.

They could, but it is clear from the head of the new agency, Grainne Moss, that the English meaning prevails. This in itself sends a message; that the Maori name is secondary, one implication of which could be that Maori interests - also shared by many Pakeha - are of lesser status than the Government's.



We can expect the agency's mission, vision and values, and its Statements of Intent to reflect this bias, which will in turn drive behaviours.

The question begging to be answered is what is being acted out through the inclusion of a Maori name that has, in effect, no status? How will that contribute to a more inclusive, secure society?

Dr Germana Nicklin is deputy director and senior lecturer at the Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Massey University. Her research focus is the relationship between narrative and action.

- Hawkes Bay Today

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3 comments

I feel very sorry for you doc, what a different world you must live in. Would seem in your reality you are worried about names and stories they tell. Meanwhile back on planet earth we have kids being bashed by those that should love them. We have kids going hungry while mum sucks on P. And yes it would be nice to have the name nice and fluffy but action is required, not words. This ministry needs to be accountable and should be scrutinized closely and often, after all they will deal with a precis item. We need the right people in the job and we need to pay them well and if they don't perform then thanks for coming. But no, they won't do that, might be culturally insensitive or the like, god forbid they put the kid first and do their job. What happens when you put a whole heap of people with titles in a room? They create CYPF type organization that is doomed to fail because they worry about names and culture etc and way down the list is the kid. Should have called it Children First and every employee should be made to chant it 10 times each morning when they start. Maybe we would see a change.

Happy Chappy - 03:58 PM Tuesday, 11 Apr 2017

Well said.

CityLimits - New Zealand - 03:58 PM Tuesday, 11 Apr 2017

"Her research focus is the relationship between narrative and action". And it is possible after years of analysis she can't tell the difference between actually doing something and just talking about it.

akiwi - Hastings - 08:27 PM Saturday, 15 Apr 2017