

Dr Rawinia Higgins

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[Interviewer question to 00.16: How has Te Teo maori changed over the course of your career?]

I've been an academic for 21 years, since my first academic position, and so quite a lot has changed in terms of the tertiary sector, just viewing how Māori Studies as a, a field of study has changed. I came in before the wānanga system and of course when wānanga were introduced, the three wānanga that are here today, they were still quite fledgling. Now they've grown as institutions and of course Māori Studies used to be almost the wānanga within a wānanga, as such, as a university. And so tertiary policy has changed as well. That's changed the landscape of who comes to universities, who learns in Māori Studies particularly, and I think in some ways has an impact on who can teach things Māori and where, where are they best taught. Are they best placed in universities or should they be in wānanga? And so I think that's had an impact on, on my work.

[Interviewer question 1.30 to 1.35: Who comes to learn now compared to 21 years ago?]

I think it's, it's still relatively the same groups or students; our students are still the same. The ability to have a choice, I think, is one of the things we should be celebrating: the ability to still come to university and learn about Māori identity, culture and language. But also the wānanga system is another opportunity for our people to seek education: where they might not have necessarily come to universities, they're able to get a tertiary qualification through the wānanga system.

[Interviewer question 2.11 to 2.17: Based on current trends, do you think this opportunity will continue to be available?]

I think that Māori Studies will always have a place in universities. I think historically we've managed to form a solid foundation in terms of developing the field of study, language, culture and at the moment while there are limitations to gaining access to, say, language and culture in, in the compulsory education sectors, there still will be a need for Māori students who want to reconnect or want to learn about things Māori at the tertiary level.

[Interviewer question 2.58 to 3.03: Can you anticipate any changes with Maori in the economy or society?]

I think more recently, particularly as a result of the Treaty settlement process, we've seen an increase in the state of Māori economics and the contribution that Māori make to the economy. And so that is also one of those changes that has happened, that you can see the dynamics, political dynamics, kind of shifting, particularly as tribes build their economic base. It's certainly evident with the Waikato Tainui experiences, the Ngai Tahu experiences, how their influence or power of influence in their communities and their Takiwā is quite pronounced, and that's 20 years on from their Treaty settlements. So you can only imagine that others, if they are successful in developing their economic wealth, are going to become more influential in terms of politics, social standing, influence – and I think influence is a key part of their contribution to the country.

[Interviewer question 4.23 to 4.29: Can you predict any wildcards that could disrupt this?]

I think with the demand and the ever-shrinking globe, the need to follow the pack rather than be the leader of the pack will always make it a kind of contentious space. The idea that if we learn other people's languages and other people's cultures, to try and advance ourselves in the world, rather than looking at ourselves and what strengths we already have, what language this country is founded on and using that as our distinctiveness, then I think that will always be the kind of paradox for us as a small nation, wanting to be like a big nation – yet in many ways we are a big nation within our small islands, and have proven to be world class. Yeah, it's around how do we better look at ourselves to be able to promote that.

[Interviewer question 5.36 to 5.41: What do you think people living in 2065 would say to us?]

I think it would be to think about what makes us unique rather than trying to be like everybody else. Trying to find the distinctive edge in who we are and our identity as a people. And in a global-focussed country, that rapidly shrinks through new technology. Mechanisms that allow us to be more global, finding our own space and enhancing and supporting our own distinctiveness would be something that has to be something we should be considering as part of our sustainability, so we're not just homogenous. I think there is a shift to being homogenous rather than distinctive. We're not homogenous, and we have the ability to build on our heritage, our unique landscape, our unique position in the world; its isolation gives us a sense of being able to preserve more in a more unique way that yeah, I would think that would be something we should be cognisant of.

[Interviewer question 7.06 to 7.11: What kind of leadership do you think we need to maintain that distinctive edge?]

I think that we would drill down to keeping with the distinctiveness theme. The country's founded on the Treaty and I think we don't give voice to that enough, in so much that partnerships and working better at partnerships to build a more distinctive New Zealand identity that both local or regional governments could adopt more that draws more people in to think about the wider collective. Rather than just thinking, let's be like other republics or Commonwealth countries, so that we follow a very Westminster type approach to the world, but it's not the only approach. If we draw back further in our history to the principles of the Treaty and working through that, I think that probably could provide a good kind of blueprint for better: knowing what hasn't worked and building on what could work to build better relationships.

[Interviewer question 8.28 to 8.33: Any final thoughts?]

I think one of the advantages of being a small nation is the ability to have the conversations where we can try and, and at least, engage in conversations around who are we, where do we want to be; thinking about our environment, thinking about our people, thinking about our place in the world, and I think that is one of the things that makes us unique. But also reflecting on our history is a history that also needs to reflect on where it starts from - not in 1769, but a little bit further, thinking about the land, its environment and starting from there and working our way through to what it could be in the future.

[musical interlude 9.22 to END]

Recording ENDS: 9.33