

The 1999 national monitoring assessments were, to our knowledge, the first assessments conducted at national level in Te Reo Māori using tasks originally developed to be administered nationally in English. Predictably, under these circumstances, some significant difficulties were experienced in that first year. These were carefully evaluated and substantial improvements in the sampling, translation and assessment procedures were implemented for the assessments in 2000 and 2001. The improvements addressed concerns about the language capabilities of the sampled students and the appropriateness of the Māori translations, but considerable caution is still required when interpreting the results presented in this report. This chapter explains why such caution is needed.

Development and selection of tasks

About 10 percent of the assessment tasks used with the Māori immersion students were developed from ideas put forward at a task development hui of Māori immersion teachers. These were tasks believed to be particularly appropriate for students learning in Māori immersion settings, but they were also used nationally in the assessments conducted in English.



The remaining tasks were proposed by teachers participating in regional task development workshops, by NEMP staff members, or by members of the

NEMP national advisory panels for music, technology or literacy. Initial ideas were developed and tried out by NEMP staff, and then subjected to careful scrutiny by the advisory panel for that curriculum area (each of which included at least one Māori immersion educator). All tasks were then checked for their suitability for Māori students by those attending a combined meeting of the NEMP Māori Immersion Education Advisory Committee and the NEMP Māori Reference Group (the latter focuses on the interests of Māori students who will be assessed in English).

The tasks resulting from these procedures have been accepted as relevant to all categories of students, including Māori immersion students. Nevertheless, given the imbalance in the sources of the tasks, the total collection of tasks somewhat favours students learning in English from the mainstream curriculum rather than students learning in Māori from the Māori curriculum. For future assessments, greater involvement of Māori immersion teachers in task development will continue to be given priority, with the help of Te Runanga Nui o nga Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa.

Translation from English to Māori

Six translators, including two native speakers, working in two teams of three, were brought together in Dunedin for two one-week periods. This allowed considerable consultation within teams, and then consultation between teams after back translation had occurred. Some of the translators had administered assessment tasks in 1999 or 2000, and therefore were quite aware of the language capabilities of year 8 students. The English language versions of the tasks were not in final form, so that where necessary the English could be edited to facilitate the development of Māori and English versions that were conceptually and linguistically equivalent.

After initial translation, all tasks were tried out in a Kura Kaupapa Māori, and further adjustments made. Finally, an experienced immersion teacher who had not previously been involved in the translation work reviewed all tasks, looking specifically at the appropriateness of task language for year 8 students. A NEMP staff member who had evaluated the 1999 and 2000 translation processes and outcomes supervised all of the translation processes. In reaching final decisions about task wording, that staff member worked collaboratively with the NEMP directors and one of the senior translators.

Despite all of these precautions, reviews of the tasks in this report by members of the NEMP Māori Immersion Education Advisory Committee and the NEMP Māori Reference Group indicated that some of the tasks used literal translations that would be difficult for many immersion students to understand, and that other tasks (particularly in mathematics) suffered from unresolved challenges that schools and teachers are facing in developing or adopting appropriate Māori language for some of the concepts being assessed. No consensus has emerged on the appropriate language for some of these concepts. In this report, particular language difficulties with some assessment tasks have been highlighted in the commentaries associated with those tasks.



Student sample and task administration

The original sample of schools and students for the 2001 assessments reflected the national population of year 8 students with more than four years of Māori immersion education. Seventy percent of the 120 students were to be in immersion schools (predominantly Kura Kaupapa), while the other 30 percent were to be in immersion classes (80 to 100 percent of instruction in Māori) at mainstream schools. Three of the originally sampled fourteen schools withdrew for various reasons (see Appendix), and appropriate replacements were found for two of them. Unexpectedly large numbers of students who did not meet the requirement of more than four years of Māori immersion education prevented the sample of students from reaching its planned size (96 students attempted assessment tasks, rather than the 120 originally planned).

The initial goal is that all Māori immersion students will be assessed in Māori. Teachers administering NEMP tasks are trained to offer students help with language so that language difficulties are less likely to undermine students' performances. For instance, limited reading or writing capabilities should not be allowed to prevent students from showing what they can do in music or technology. For the assessments in 2001, account was taken of international research suggesting that at least five years of immersion in a language is required before performance on assessments in that language is not significantly undermined by language difficulties. Only students reported by schools to have had more than four years in Māori immersion education were included in the assessments. This allowed all assessments to be conducted predominantly or entirely in Māori.

While every effort is made to ensure that the same approaches are used whether tasks are administered in Māori or in English, only 4 teachers administer the tasks in Māori whereas 52 teachers administer the tasks in English. Thus the results for Māori immersion students are particularly likely to be affected by task administration approaches adopted by individual teachers.

Marking

Similarly, every effort is made to ensure that the same standards are used in marking work done in Māori and English. However, the fact that only a small proportion of the student markers and teacher markers have the capability to mark work done in Māori means that any task attempted in Māori is marked by one

or two markers while the same task attempted in English is marked by 18 or 19 markers. The results for Māori immersion students therefore are particularly vulnerable to unusual interpretations of marking criteria or unusual implementation of marking standards by one or two markers.



Interpretation of results

This report compares the results achieved by Māori students in Māori immersion settings with the results achieved by Māori students in general education (English language) settings.

Readers should be very cautious, however, in drawing any conclusions about the relative merits of Māori immersion and English language education from

these results. While translation and task administration issues have been improved since the 1999 assessments, it is still not clear that Māori immersion students were on an equal footing with general education students in understanding the tasks and communicating their responses. It is desirable that a higher proportion of tasks used in the Māori immersion assessment originate from Māori immersion educators, and that some of the tasks are developed in Māori and then translated into English. Further effort to make task language appropriate for Māori immersion students must also continue, with less focus on accuracy of word-by-word translation and more emphasis on achieving language patterns that would predominate in Māori immersion education settings.

It should also be remembered that curriculum emphases are different in Māori immersion education and English language education. While all schools must address the essential learning areas and essential skills of the New Zealand curriculum, Māori immersion education places much greater emphasis on Māori language and culture, with a correspondingly reduced emphasis on English literacy until the late years of primary education. Also, quite modest differences in emphasis and timing for other curriculum areas could have significantly influenced the comparative results reported here.

A final point is that Māori immersion education is in a comparatively early stage of development. Many immersion schools and classes have been established for only a few years. Teaching and learning resources in Te Reo Māori are scarce, as are teachers with suitable expertise. High levels of teacher, parent and student commitment help to compensate for these obstacles to successful learning, but further improvement should be achieved as Māori immersion education grows and consolidates.