

## 2 Ngā Take Aromatawai me ngā Take Tātari i ngā Hua ka Puta – Issues Concerning the Assessments and their Interpretation



Our national monitoring assessments in 1999 were the first assessments conducted at national level in te reo Māori using tasks originally developed to be administered nationally in English. Since then, we have worked hard to improve the task development, sampling, translation, task administration and marking procedures for these assessments, but have not yet been satisfied with all components of the assessments. This year, our major concern is the sample of schools in Māori immersion education.

### 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 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 other teachers participating in regional task development workshops, by NEMP staff members, or by members of the NEMP national advisory panels for science or visual arts. 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 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.

### Translation from English to Māori

In earlier years, up to six Māori translators worked on translations collaboratively, supported and coordinated by NEMP staff. The group of translators always included some native speakers. The procedures included forward and back translation, with the possibility of adjusting the English as well as the Māori to achieve closer equivalence. After initial

translation, all tasks were tried out in a Kura Kaupapa Māori, and further adjustments made as apparently required. Despite the care taken, it became apparent that some of the translations were rather literal (rather than colloquial), and not well aligned with the Māori language commonly used in Māori immersion education settings.



For the 2003 assessments, full responsibility for the translations was given to He Kupenga Hao i te Reo Ltd. Members of this trust have considerable recent curriculum knowledge of and experience in Māori immersion settings, and the new arrangements fitted with our belief that it would be desirable to increase the degree of Māori ownership of this part of NEMP. In addition to undertaking the translations, members of the trust made substantial contributions to the fine-tuning of tasks. After the initial translation work, all tasks were tried out in a Kura Kaupapa Māori, and further adjustments made if judged necessary. We are confident that these arrangements produced the best Māori language task instructions and resources yet achieved for our assessments.

### Student Sample and Task Administration

The original sample of schools and students for the 2003 Māori immersion education assessments reflected the national population of year 8 students with more than four years of Māori immersion education. Sixty percent of the 120 students were to be selected from immersion schools (predominantly Kura Kaupapa), while the other 40 percent were to be selected from immersion classes (80 to 100 percent of instruction in Māori) at mainstream schools. Unfortunately, four of the originally sampled 12 schools withdrew for various reasons (see Appendix). Because of the limited

number of Māori immersion schools and their relatively small enrolments (an average of less than 10 year 8 students per school), three of these schools needed to be replaced from other regions, raising serious doubts about how nationally representative the final sample remained.

The initial expectation 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. Since the 2001 assessments, account has been 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 and a half years in Māori immersion education were included in the assessments. This allowed all assessments to be conducted predominantly or entirely in Māori.

Just four teachers administer the tasks in Māori, which means that the results for Māori immersion students are particularly likely to be affected by task administration approaches adopted by one or two individual teachers. Evidence obtained during the marking of the videotaped assessments suggested that all four Māori administrators in 2003 administered the tasks well, and the proportion of Māori immersion students completing the set tasks was the highest yet achieved.

### Interpretation of Results

Readers should be cautious about interpreting the results as fully indicative of the achievements of year 8 Māori medium students in the subjects covered by the 2003 assessments. The area of greatest concern is the sample of schools and students, because one third of the schools in the original sample withdrew. It is not possible

to be confident that the replacement schools were closely comparable to those that withdrew, so that the sample remained nationally representative.

While translation and task administration processes appeared to work well, language issues remained troublesome. Because there was an attempt to keep most of the tasks equivalent to English language versions, some of the Māori language used in some of the tasks was not colloquial language that the Māori medium students would be familiar with, thus making it harder for them to perform really well on these tasks.

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. Resulting differences in emphasis and timing for other curriculum areas could have significantly influenced the results reported here.

A final point is that Māori immersion education is still 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 able to be achieved as Māori immersion education grows and consolidates.

