# Ngā Manu Kōrero: Revitalizing Communication, Customs and Cultural Competencies Amongst Māori Students, Teachers, Whānau and Communities

# Rāwiri Tinirau and Annemarie Gillies

### Introduction

The Ngā Manu Kōrero Speech Contest has grown to be one of the biggest and most positive events for New Zealand secondary-school students, where competitors articulate their thoughts and aspirations in both Māori and English. The contest is acknowledged as an avenue that enhances language and cultural development amongst Māori youth, yet no formal investigation has been launched to ascertain whether Ngā Manu Kōrero contributes to the revitalization of Māori language, customs and cultural competencies. Due to the number of schools involved and to the number of contestants that participate at school, regional and national levels, organizing and managing the event requires skill and experience in a range of areas, to ensure that it is run successfully in a culturally appropriate context. The purpose of this paper is to share the results of a research project that focused on Ngā Manu Kōrero, the findings pertaining to cultural revitalization, their application at regional and national level, and how they affect Māori students, teachers, whānau (family, families), and communities.

# Background and history of Ngā Manu Kōrero

The Ngā Manu Kōrero Speech Contest was originally known as the Korimako Speech Contest, named after the trophy that was donated by the then Governor General, Sir Bernard Fergusson. The aim of the contest was to encourage among Māori secondary-school pupils a greater command and fluency in the use of spoken English. The Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) organized school and regional contests before the inaugural national final, which was held in August 1965. The contest was sponsored and organized jointly by the Māori Education Foundation

(now Māori Education Trust) and the PPTA, with the intention that the contest be held annually. A section for senior Māori oratory was added in 1977, in memory of Waikato elder and scholar Dr Pei Te Hurinui Jones, who died in 1976. Dr Jones was famous for his oratory and prolific writing skills and was instrumental in revising the Williams Dictionary. He was also awarded the degree of Doctor of Literature by the University of Waikato. It was decided that the Pei Te Hurinui Jones section be open to all New Zealand students, with the purpose of enhancing and promoting the use of the Māori language amongst all secondary-school students.

At the national final held at Wairoa in 1980, a junior English section was added to the contest. A tāonga was presented the following year by the people of Ngāti Kahungunu ki Te Wairoa in memory of Sir Turi Carroll. Sir Turi Carroll was the Chairman of the Wairoa County Council and was the inaugural Chair of the New Zealand Māori Council. The Rāwhiti Īhaka section for junior Māori oratory was presented in 1983 by past-principal Scottie McPherson and senior pupils of St. Stephen's School in Auckland in memory of past teacher Rāwhiti Īhaka. The award acknowledged his skills in teaching science and mathematics; he was reputed to be one of the first Māori graduates in science.

Due to the growth and development of the contest, which now incorporates the four sections discussed above, it was felt that the name of the contest should be changed from the Korimako Speech Contest. In 1987, the contest became known as Ngā Whakataetae mō Ngā Manu Kōrero o Ngā Kura Tuarua, though today it is simply and widely known as Ngā Manu Kōrero. Over 1,000 speakers participate at 14 regional competitions throughout New Zealand, vying for 56 places at the national final. Up to 5,000 students, teachers,

whānau members, and supporters attend the national contest, hosted by a different region each year (Tinirau & Gillies, 2008).

# Research partners and participants

The research partners in this particular research project were identified as the Māori Education Trust, the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA), and the National Organising Committee responsible for the 2003 and 2004 National Ngā Manu Kōrero Speech Contest. In 2003 and 2004, the National Organising Committee consisted primarily of secondary-school teachers of te reo Māori (Māori language) in the Manawatū-Horowhenua region. In 2006, the researcher was asked to assist the Taranaki region to coordinate the national competition, and an incorporated society, Te Ohu Manaaki o Taranaki, was established for this purpose. Thus, direct involvement by the researcher in the national competitions in 2003, 2004, and 2006 has informed this paper.

The research participants were nominated by the research partners as spokespeople for their respective organizations. Both the Māori Education Trust and the National Organising Committees can be considered Māori in their orientation and organiszation (Tinirau, 2004a, 2004b; Tinirau & Gillies, 2008). The PPTA has Māori employees and representation and is informed by Te Huarahi, their Māori executive committee. As the PPTA and the Māori Education Trust have been at the forefront of administering and sponsoring the Ngā Manu Korero Speech Contest since its inception, it was vital this research gained support from these two organizations. As the National Organising Committee was formed to host the National Ngā Manu Korero Speech Contest for 2003 and 2004, support from this body was also considered crucial, before this research commenced (Tinirau, 2004a, 2004b; Tinirau & Gillies, 2008).

# **Research principles**

After reviewing a range of methodological frameworks and ethical considerations, it was felt that the principles of this research should be based on those encapsulated in the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>1</sup> This was

proposed by Bishop (1994) regarding issues of control and empowerment and the role non-Māori may have in Māori research. Although the research involved a Māori researcher and participants, the treaty principles—positive contribution, partnership, participation, and protection were still deemed applicable.

Research must be beneficial to the partners of research, and thus, the principle of positive contribution is of significance (Bevan-Brown, 1998). With regard to this project, the research would need to assist future organizers, teachers, adjudicators, participants, and whānau. Before the research could begin, a clear understanding of the aims and aspirations of the research partners was required. An appreciation for the research needs of the three organizations was gained when the idea for this research was first conceived and offered. As a result of direct communication, a research proposal was formulated and disseminated, and the research partners, through the research participants, were given the opportunity to scrutinize and support the research area (Tinirau, 2004a, 2004b; Tinirau & Gillies, 2008). The research has been used to guide national organising committees in their work towards managing and organizing National Ngā Manu Kōrero Speech Contests.

The principle of partnership embraces the view that those involved in research would be partners in this research. The notions of mahitahi (cooperation, collaboration) and whānau (Durie, 1998) require research to be based on mutual respect and understanding between the researcher and research partners. This research on Ngā Manu Korero sought to establish meaningful relationships with the research partners and to recognize the knowledge, skills, and resources these partners and their nominated participants could contribute toward the research project and to Ngā Manu Kōrero itself. The kanohi-ki-te-kanohi (face-toface) interviews that were conducted saw the research participants draw on their personal knowledge and professional expertise in developing their responses, and having this and other opportunities to shape this project advanced research partnerships (Tinirau, 2004a, 2004b; Tinirau & Gillies, 2008).

Participation ensures that research partners are "active participants at all stages of the research

process" (Bevan-Brown, 1998, p. 236). This links to the notion that the mauri (spiritual life-force or essence) of the host community be acknowledged (Durie, 1992), and in the case of this research, the mauri of Ngā Manu Kōrero itself, through the Māori Education Trust, the PPTA, and the National Organising Committee, had to be acknowledged before the research proceeded. Participation was achieved throughout this research project, by involving the research partners (where appropriate) in the various activities of the research exercise. In particular, the interviews, fieldwork, and sourcing information directly involved all three research partners (Tinirau, 2004a, 2004b; Tinirau & Gillies, 2008).

Finally, the principle of protection must guarantee that the research partners own the knowledge collected, can make comment on the project, and may evaluate the outcomes of the research. Consultation with the research partners was considered paramount, especially with the interpretation of any provided information. Research participants were forwarded relevant sections of this research and were given the opportunity to respond and comment on the written material. This process helped protect their knowledge and ensure both that their comments were taken in the right context, and that any analysis and interpretation of information was consistent with their thoughts and ideas (Tinirau, 2004a, 2004b; Tinirau & Gillies, 2008).

### Research methods

A mixture of purposive and whakawhanaungatanga (the act of building personal relationships) sampling techniques (Gillies, Tinirau, & Mako, 2007; Te Pūmanawa Hauora, 1997) was employed to select key participants for rich and illuminative information, the aim of which was to gain insight and meaning, rather than empirical generalization, to the population (Patton, 2002). Data was organized and analyzed using thematic analysis focusing on identifiable themes and patterns of living and behavior. However, this analysis resonates with the worldview of the community by involving Māori throughout this process. Finally, the duality of the roles of the Māori researcher (being both the researcher and part of the research community; an insider and an outsider simultaneously) and the

'intimacy' that benefits the research (Walsh-Tapiata, 1998) was acknowledged, providing a sense of security and safety for those involved. The researcher has had a long association with Ngā Manu Kōrero: first, as a past competitor and winner of the contest; second, as a regional coordinator from 2000 to 2001; third, as a judge from 1999 to today; and finally as a member of National Organising Committees in 2003, 2004, and 2006. Data was also obtained through sourcing several primary sources, and private documents were offered freely by whānau, organizations and communities to assist with the research.

# Findings: Using and learning te reo Māori

Since the introduction of the Pei Te Hurinui Jones section for senior Māori oratory in 1977, Ngā Manu Kōrero has witnessed a growth in the number of speakers competing in the Māori sections. It should be noted that the number of competitors in the Māori sections at regional level tend to fluctuate from year to year for a variety of reasons. More recently, the Māori sections have a propensity to be dominated by students who have received Māori immersion schooling, although they may have relocated to mainstream or private schools. This involvement of Māori immersion students has brought a new dimension to the contest, where te reo Māori is not only the language spoken on the marae (traditional gathering place) and on the stage, but also amongst the audience:

I have observed increasingly over the years is the language spoken at Manu Kōrero is equally Māori ... more and more now, that kōrero [discussion, talk] is in te reo ... that's gotta be good. (T.M. Bowkett, personal communication, June 20, 2003)

Ngā Manu Kōrero has also had a profound effect on the education of those learning Māori at secondary-school (Māori Education Foundation, 1989). However, the quality of the language being spoken by competitors continues to be an issue to monitor. Comments by judges have persisted in encouraging teachers and whānau to ensure that a speaker's language is grammatically correct and that words are pronounced properly. The addition of the impromptu section for senior speakers has encouraged the development of fluency and articulation in both languages. Speakers at

Ngā Manu Kōrero are therefore not merely memorizing speeches—they are also encouraged to think on their feet.

### Māori customs and practices

Tikanga Māori (Māori customs, practices) is applied to the organization and management of Ngā Manu Kōrero, and this differentiates Ngā Manu Kōrero as a distinctly Māori event. The observance of tikanga Māori has also had a positive effect on the students that have attended the contest:

Participation is now nationwide and the active support of parents is to be commended. So too is the full observance of kawa [customs of the marae] by the host tribes. The young students and their supporters are uplifted—a feeling that permeated the whole occasion (Māori Education Foundation, 1989, p. 3).

As different regions tono (offer, bid) to host the national final to be held within their district, those that travel to the contest will experience different tikanga, depending on the tangata whenua (people of the land, hosts). This gives rangatahi (youth) and others the chance to observe a range of customs and protocols practiced by the different hosts throughout Aotearoa. At a regional level, there may be several iwi (tribe/s) within the region's boundaries, whose tikanga differ. Within some iwi, tikanga may be different amongst the various hapū (sub-tribes). Thus, Ngā Manu Kōrero allows rangatahi to witness this diversity and appreciate their own tikanga, as well as understand and respect the tikanga of others. Another cultural element that is promoted through Ngā Manu Kōrero includes the inter-generational transmission of language, knowledge, and skills ("Big turn-out at Tauranga," November 1987). Competitors tend to source advice from not only their teachers, but also their own elders and whānau. This relationship between the old and the young is a continuation of the traditional approach to education within whānau, hapū, and iwi, where information was passed down to the next generation by those that retained the knowledge. Furthermore, the assistance acquired from elders and whānau reaffirms that the speaker is not only representing their school or their region; they also epitomize their whānau, hapū,

and iwi, and have a responsibility to represent them to the best of their abilities.

Ngā Manu Kōrero also fosters immense support for speakers, which can be correlated to marae etiquette and tikanga Māori (Murchie, November 22, 1994). It is not uncommon for haka (traditional expressive dance) and waiata (song/s) to be performed by members of the audience before or after a speech, although spontaneous outbursts such as these must also be in keeping with local tikanga. Haka and waiata for winners of Ngā Manu Kōrero are also evident throughout the prize-giving ceremony. Support for a speaker can be measured by an audience's reaction, not unlike that on a marae. The difference with Ngā Manu Kōrero is that the volume of applause is used to denote the impact that the speaker has had on the general audience.

# **Enhancing Māori identity**

Ngā Manu Kōrero has had a positive effect on the rejuvenation of Māori identity amongst the rangatahi:

... it was about ensuring that our Māori students, our Māori children had the opportunities to learn, and to express in English and in te reo Māori. Part of that is building their self-esteem, their confidence, and their pride of who they are ... that essence, that wairua [spirit] about the kaupapa [purpose] is still strong (T.M. Bowkett, personal communication, June 20, 2003).

In recognition of a speaker's affiliations and identity, contestants at school, regional, and national level are encouraged to complete a student profile, detailing their affiliations to their maunga (mountain/s), awa (river/s), hapū, iwi, marae, and waka (canoe/s)—all of which have become an intrinsic part of Māori identity. These student profiles are used by the compère to introduce the speaker to the judges and audience. Ngā Manu Kōrero also promotes research skills, where many speakers choose to investigate matters of personal and tribal importance; in the Māori sections, tribal dialects and styles are presented, reaffirming the link that Ngā Manu Kōrero has with promoting whānau, hapū, and iwi identities. Nga Manu Kōrero offers participants a forum to express themselves and to develop their self-esteem and confidence:

There is that whole thing about building up self-esteem ... confidence in the public arena ... the public image you portray comes as a result of having entered the Ngā Manu Kōrero (D. Hauraki, personal communication, June 19, 2003).

The audience is expected to support all speakers, and give them a courteous hearing, and this support, together with that which emanates from a speaker's whānau, school, and region, is crucial in building confidence and pride. The link between knowing te reo Māori and confidence has also been reiterated (Hearn, 1990).

Being a competition, there is a risk that a speaker's confidence and self-esteem may be damaged by, amongst other things, stress, lack of time or preparation, and comments from the judges or audience. However, all speakers—regardless of whether they have performed well or not—are acknowledged for their delivery and are presented with a certificate of participation. It is hoped that through this, and continuous encouragement, the confidence and self-esteem of speakers may be extended.

The real effect that Ngā Manu Kōrero has had on Māori language, culture, and identity is not only appreciated by organizers, reporters, leaders, sponsors, teachers, kaumātua, and whānau, but also by the rangatahi themselves. Following one particular national final, one student contemplated their experience of Ngā Manu Kōrero:

I believe that as a part of learning te reo at school, opportunities like these should be essential. By just being a bystander at this event you can gain a lot of knowledge. The kapahaka [Māori performing arts group] was just great, and it really does show how much support there is within a group towards their speaker, in the way they perform so strongly. And you can learn a lot from that. But for me the best thing about it was being and feeling a part of a Māori society. Being welcomed into a whole new community and being made to feel that you belong. Feeling their love and warmth and continuously learning different Māori customs, e.g., kawa of the marae/kaupapa of their iwi etc ... there is so much more wairua in the culture. The way they spoke, with it all around us, all of us found ourselves improving and strengthening our Māoritanga [Māori culture]. And there was a constant use of te reo amongst our

group and we were so proud. We came back so much more confident, so much in fact, I found it difficult to switch back to speaking English after my return (Rangiaho, n.d.).

Thus, Ngā Manu Kōrero offers rangatahi an opportunity to further their language and public-speaking skills and to extend their confidence within an environment that is culturally appropriate and encourages the revitalization of Māori language, culture, and identity.

# **Developing oratory skills**

Skills in oratory were highly valued by Māori, as it was through oral transmission and discussion that knowledge was passed down through the generations:

... oratory was the only way that whakapapa [genealogy], mōteatea [traditional song/s], history were passed from generation to generation ... an essential element in retaining things Māori ... oratory and whaikōrero and speech making ... it is part of the fabric of our culture, our society, our identity (D. Hauraki, personal communication, June 19, 2003).

Ngā Manu Kōrero therefore provides a forum where the tradition of oratory is not only preserved, but where high standards of oratory are encouraged and attained. The contest also showcases the product of Māori language revitalization activities, as well as the re-emergence of traditional forms of language and delivery styles ("Māori oratory successes," 1980). It is recognised that Ngā Manu Kōrero prepares speakers for positions on the marae:

You have displayed tremendous skill, ability and confidence and what you have now achieved will be of good use on our many marae when your time comes. ("A learning experience for all," October 1982, p. 5)

Although Ngā Manu Kōrero encourages and promotes the use of te reo Māori, it also advocates fluency in English (Māori Education Trust, 1993). Thus, the ability to communicate in both languages is considered critical, and the introduction of the E Tipu E Rea trophy for the student, school, or region that attains very high competency in both recognizes and acknowledges these dual abilities. There are some schools or regions that produce speakers who consistently do well in a

particular section. However, there are exceptions to this generalization, for example Māori immersion school students entering the Māori and English sections and doing well in both areas.

# **Developing other cultural competencies**

Oratory skills are not the only skills that are developed through Ngā Manu Kōrero. Other essential skills that are required for future educational and employment opportunities are also realised:

... what happens with our young people that come through Manu Kōrero, they have developed and nurtured skills ... they've developed the ability to research and to perform, essentially they are taking on some of the basic skills that we require in people who become policy analysts, business analysts, researchers in all fields (T.M. Bowkett, personal communication, June 20, 2003).

Therefore, skills in both research and writing are utilized by contestants in preparing for Ngā Manu Kōrero. Research may take the form of reading literature; conducting interviews; seeking advice from kaumātua, teachers, and whānau; observing current events; analyzing different scenarios; testing hypotheses; and dreaming of what the future holds. Once information is collected, a topic can be confirmed, and a speech can be formulated. Whilst some contestants can write their speech in a matter of hours, others may require weeks of preparation and writing time. Whatever the topic, method, or timeframe, contestants develop skills in areas that complement their educational pursuits. Through feedback from their peers, whānau, and teachers, participants are able to revise their speeches and strengthen them where necessary.

Delivery and presentation skills are encouraged through Ngā Manu Kōrero, as the ability to deliver a speech is an art form unto itself. Speakers use a range of styles—from the more conservative to the contemporary—as well as shades between the two extremes. Some speakers incorporate drama, humour, singing, poetry, dance, and other aspects of performance to enhance their speech and delivery.

The ability to persuade and entice an audience is yet another skill promoted at Ngā Manu Kōrero. Although the majority of the audience are rangatahi,

contestants aim their messages to not only their own peers, but to politicians, leaders, teachers, whānau, and others. Those in attendance at Ngā Manu Kōrero can be influenced by the personalities presenting to them, as well as by the messages that are being communicated. Speakers at Ngā Manu Kōrero can have an extremely powerful and positive effect on their peers, as rangatahi are being presented as their own role models. Ngā Manu Kōrero therefore facilitates the development of oratory and skills in a number of areas, and these will be of benefit to them in the future.

# **Growing Māori leadership**

The true impact that past competitors have had on the contest is unknown; however, many have reciprocated and shown their appreciation to Ngā Manu Kōrero by being involved as adjudicators, compères, organizers, tutors, or teachers that work within the schools and regions. However, there are others that are yet to offer their services. Although there are differences in relation to when and how past competitors have reciprocated and contributed to Ngā Manu Kōrero, there is no denying that many have gone on to take leading positions in society:

We see our former participants in Manu Korero taking on important lead roles in social development, economic political development—some in Western society, some remain within focusing more with Māori people (T.M. Bowkett, personal communication, June 20, 2003). Ngā Manu Kōrero has been noted as an event that reaffirms and acknowledges emerging Māori leaders and encourages rangatahi to utilize the skills and abilities they possess to be future leaders of te ao Māori (Māori society). As a result, many leaders in Māori society were once participants in Ngā Manu Kōrero, and it is likely that many current competitors will emerge as future Māori leaders. However, the extent to which Ngā Manu Kōrero has influenced the lives of leaders, although understood by the three research partners, is yet to be determined.

There is a strong sense that leaders in society acknowledge Ngā Manu Kōrero as an event that seeks the viewpoints of rangatahi on many facets of Māori development and New Zealand society. Many leaders acknowledge Ngā Manu Kōrero as an exceptionally

positive event, and this recognition is increasing:

I think the fact that more and more of our so-called leaders in society acknowledge that it is a huge event in terms of Māori education, in terms of the way in which people are honoured to be asked to be a part of Manu Kōrero ... I think the fact that so many of our leaders in Māoridom and ... general society ... in Aotearoa see it as one of the key events in the country (T.M. Bowkett, personal communication, June 20, 2003).

Leadership as a concept and as an exemplar are embodied in the memorial trophies at Ngā Manu Kōrero, which are awarded to those that attain the highest levels of oratory within their respective sections. Memorial trophies not only conjure up the life works and qualities of those leaders, but also act as motivators for rangatahi to take up leadership roles when they become available. Many past competitors have done just that and are now leaders in their chosen fields. In these positions of leadership, they are role models for current and future Ngā Manu Korero competitors. The contest is also building its own credibility and reputation amongst others in society as a uniquely Māori event that fosters not only oratory and related skills amongst the competitors, but also qualities and networks for future leaders of Māoridom and New Zealand society.

### Concluding comments

This paper highlights the importance of establishing meaningful relationships with research partners. It recognizes the knowledge, skills and resources that each bring to the research collaboration. Ngā Manu Kōrero, in particular, has contributed to the number of young people who have become proficient in both the Māori and English languages. The speech contest has had a profound effect on the education of those learning Māori at secondary-school.

Ngā Manu Kōrero has had a positive effect on Māori identity amongst rangatahi; competitors choose to investigate matters of personal and tribal importance, and tribal dialects and styles are presented, reaffirming the link that this event has with promoting whānau, hapū, and iwi identities. In preparing rangatahi for roles on the marae and in Māori society, this contest also advocates fluency in English, thereby sup-

porting participation in New Zealand society generally. It is viewed as an educational experience and training ground for emerging Māori leaders and encourages rangatahi to develop and utilize culturally appropriate skills and expertise. Many contemporary Māori leaders have participated in different ways in this competition.

Finally, the management and organization of Ngā Manu Kōrero has a strong tikanga Māori element that permeates at all levels of the competition. This, amongst other things, is what distinguishes Ngā Manu Kōrero from any other non-Māori events.

### **GLOSSARY**

aroha love awa river/s

haka traditional expressive dance

hapū sub-tribe/s iwi tribe/s kanohi-ki-te-kanohi face-to-face

kapahaka Māori performing arts group kaumātua elders, proficient in marae protocol

kaupapa purpose

kawa customs of the marae kōrero discussion, talk

mahitahi cooperation, collaboration

Māoritanga Māori culture

marae traditional gathering place

maunga mountain/s

mauri spiritual life-force or essence

mita dialectal differences mōteatea traditional song/s

Pākehā New Zealander of European descent

rangatahi youth

tangata whenua people of the land, hosts

tautoko support te ao Māori Māori society te reo Māori Māori language

tikanga Māori Māori customs and practices

tono offer, bid
waiata song/s
wairua spirit
waka canoe/s
whaikōrero oratory
whakapapa genealogy
whakataukī proverb/s

whakawhanaungatanga the act of building personal relationships

whānau family, families

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### **ENDNOTE**

<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 between Māori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown. It allowed for, amongst a number of things, the establishment of a settler government.