

# Maori-language dictionary winning words of praise

by Patrick Crewdson

A pilot from the first monolingual Maori dictionary is being celebrated even before its release next month.

*Te Matapuna's* release to publishers is still a year away, but the computer system for the *Taura Whiri i te Reo Maori* dictionary has already been nominated for an award.

"We're up against some pretty expensive databases!" laughs Sharon Armstrong, project manager of *Te Matapuna* at the Maori Language Commission.

The dictionary system of 700 'n' and 'ng' words is competing with an electronic GST system from the Inland Revenue Department and a database from the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences in the Government IT section of Computerworld's 2004 Excellence Awards.

If *Te Matapuna* takes the award at next month's ceremony at the Aotea Centre, it will have done so without many taxpayer dollars. Ms Armstrong says it has only cost the commission \$40,000 so far.

*Te Matapuna* ("the source"), will include definitions for around 20,000 Maori words and will be aimed especially at those learning te reo as a second language.

Professor Margaret Mutu, an

expert in the Maori language at the University of Auckland, calls *Te Matapuna* "very, very significant", saying such a dictionary is 160 years overdue.

"It is tantamount to criminal that this country doesn't have a monolingual Maori dictionary," says Professor Mutu.

A free, interactive online version is also planned.

The philosophy behind the project – which is now in its fifth year – was to allow Maori words to be defined against other Maori words and untranslatable concepts.

"It was to move away from benchmarking our language against English all the time," says Ms Armstrong.

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According to Te Puni Kokiri's 2001 survey on the health of the Maori language, 50% of te reo readers use a dictionary if they encounter a word they do not know.

The most frequently used refer-

ences – the *Reed Concise Maori Dictionary* and the *Ngata English-Maori Dictionary* – define Maori words by their English translations.

Professor Mutu expects the dictionary to have a profound effect, especially for Maori speakers who have learned it as a second language and who do not possess an innate understanding of the language.

"A monolingual Maori dictionary is absolutely fundamental to the wellbeing of the language," she says.

The six members of the *Matapuna* team are still developing the first edition, and editing for what Ms Armstrong calls "cultural integrity".

They are receiving assistance from Te Roopu Matua, an advisory group of language experts drawn from universities and the Maori community.

The group includes Professor Pat Hohepa, formerly of Auckland University, and Te Haumihia Mason, who will soon join the *Matapuna* team as editor.

They also receive advice from Professor Graeme Kennedy of Victoria University's School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies.

Ms Armstrong hopes the *Matapuna* project will eventually grow to contain encyclopaedic and cultural knowledge.

"We've got a concept beyond the dictionary."

# Two languages key to racial harmony

by Lucy Arthur

Learning te reo Maori could play a key part in solving the country's race relations issues, language advocates say.

Lana Simmons-Donaldson, communications advisor for Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Maori (Maori Language Commission), says at the moment especially, Maori and non-Maori need to understand each other and the past.

"Learning te reo would go a long way to creating a racially harmonious environment – a positive future for the country," says Mrs Simmons-Donaldson (Ngati Porou and Ngati Taranaki).

Zoe Linsell, former translator now production assistant at Maori Television, says the media projects a Maori versus Pakeha message and the only way to stop it is to learn te reo Maori.

"The language is completely tied to culture. In order to have understanding of culture you need to have some understanding of the language. If you don't understand someone how are you supposed to get on with them?"

Miss Linsell holds a Bachelor of

Arts in Maori, although she is not Maori herself.

"I thought it was a matter of respect to learn the Maori language. I completely fell in love with it. It's given me an alternative view. It's opened up a new dimension for me," she says.

Jason King, a lecturer in te reo Maori at Auckland University of Technology, says he has had to learn English language and culture and so he understands non-Maori and non-

Maori owe the same to Maori.

"I know how to speak English and I definitely know the English culture. If you know another culture you have that much more of an open mind," says Mr King (Ngati Waikato).

The results of the 2001 survey on the Health of the Maori language show that 42% of Maori aged 15 and over (136,000) have some te reo Maori skills.

According to Statistics New Zealand, the largest group of Maori who can hold everyday conversations in te reo are aged 65 and over.

Mr King says numbers taking his night classes have gone from 20 people in one class to 80 wanting to be in one class.

**"If you don't understand someone how are you supposed to get on with them?"**

# Students get fresh weave on education

by Sia Aston

Noel Te Tai couldn't believe his luck when two artists walked through his door offering to teach his Henderson High School students traditional methods of making Maori art and material culture.

"I had to pinch myself. What they have to provide – the resources and the skills – you would normally have to pay a lot of money for. It is something we could never have budgeted for," said Mr Te Tai.

Wiremu Diamond-Wilson, of Ngati Pukenga descent and his partner Alicia Courtney presented Mr Te Tai (who has taught Maori at the school for three years) with a fully planned programme and private funding pre-approved: all they needed was a class to teach.

The proposal was for a one-year programme, teaching Year 11 and 12 students skills such as how to gather and prepare flax (harekeke), to weave and adorn kete (woven bags), and to make rope (muka).

"In Maori we learn tikanga (customs) and te reo (language), and this teaches the kids about how our ancestors lived, using harekeke to weave, to make rope and even jandals!" says Mr Te Tai.

Traditional methods are taught and the students learn about the origins of these methods, as well as a few new words of te reo as they go.

"We try and keep it very bilingual," says Mr Diamond-Wilson.

Mr Te Tai, of Ngati Te Reinga descent, who teaches students te reo as well as other Maori components like kapa haka says: "The concept complements my te reo programme perfectly."



**GREEN WEAVERS:** Henderson High School students with the flax used for traditional weaving.

Mr Diamond-Wilson and Miss Courtney who are both established contemporary artists in their own right, say they want to encourage a sense of achievement in teenagers as well as encouraging an understanding of Maori material culture.

The students are given the task of making items, which they must complete in class, with guidance from the artists. Extra classes are often held for any students who wish to stay after school to continue working on their projects.

Mr Te Tai believes this is extremely beneficial to the students in terms of learning.

"The teaching strategies Alicia and Wiremu are using are magnificent. They set tasks in a way that the students can see where they are starting, right through to the end creation."

The artists say the most rewarding

part of the class for them is seeing the changes in the students as they begin to appreciate what they are personally capable of.

"They get a sense of pride and satisfaction in themselves. Many are quite timid when they start and when they discover they can do something, they change," says Miss Courtney.

The fact that Henderson High School is a decile three school was a deciding factor for Mr Diamond-Wilson and Miss Courtney in choosing where to base their programme.

Both say they wanted to work with a lower decile school that was likely to have minimal funding and resources. They empathise with youths who may be experiencing economic hardship at home.

"A lot of teens have never been in the situation of having something (in terms of knowledge and resources)

given to them like this," says Mr Diamond-Wilson.

"In today's environment it is difficult for kids to feel good about themselves, without any economic status," says Miss Courtney.

The programme aims to change this view.

"We teach them that you don't have to be tricked that a pair of shoes will make you bigger," says Mr Diamond-Wilson, who remembers the social pressures of conforming to expensive fashions.

The students will showcase their work in an exhibition at the Corbans Estate Gallery on July 3.

The exhibition is called *Nga Whetu o Matariki* (The Stars of Matariki), and will be an opportunity for the students to have their artwork shown professionally as a culmination of their first semester's work.

# Auckland University targets poor Maori health

by Tennille Bergin

Auckland University is doing its bit to improve the poor performance of Maori in health and education.

The third annual Te Wiki o Te Hauora Maori – Maori Health Week – will be held in July this year. The four-day hui involves second-year students from the school's medical, nursing and pharmacy faculties.

The programme includes guest speakers, group work, health scenarios and is a chance for students to get involved with Maori culture.

Pamela White, manager of Auckland University's Maori and Pacific Island Health department, says the aim of the week is to bring awareness to Maori issues within the health sector.

"It's about training health professionals to work collaboratively," she says.

Medical student Joel Pirini, of Te Rarawa, will be attending.

He says it provides a good opportunity for students to discuss today's issues.

"I feel that I could give a Maori perspective on health," says Mr Pirini.

He thinks it is important for all health professionals to be exposed to training on Maori health issues.

"Maori people are in trouble health-wise."

Chief Advisor Tikanga for Auckland Regional Health Naida Glavish says a new approach is needed towards Maori health if the situation is to improve.

Ms Glavish spoke at last year's event and has been invited back this year. She talks to the students about differing approaches to health issues.

She says it is about health on a spiritual as well as a physical level.

She says it is "absolutely positive" steps like the health week that will ultimately lead to Maori health gains.