

But a hui held after the Rotorua-based contest in 1973 changed that. The maori people from Turangi offered to host the 1974 contest.

The introduction of taha maori in a very real sense led to the setting up by 1977 of the Pei Te Hurinui Jones Competition for speeches delivered in the maori language. This contest is open to all secondary school students regardless of descent or sex. It was named after Dr Pei Te Hurinui Jones who had died in 1976. He was a well-known kaumatua in the Waikato and a prolific writer in maori.

But even with the introduction of the maori speech section the contest was predominately limited to one school in each centre providing the base. But in the past two years the centre chosen for the contest has sought to involve all high schools and Christchurch has achieved something of a record in this.

As teacher of maori at Aranui High School, and with her husband, Mr Te Huaki Puanaki, organiser of the Te Kotahitanga (Unity) Maori Club, Tihi Puanaki has been able to ensure that the contests have developed as the only major and regular hui where the focus falls on young people.

This focal point has had a vital role in providing young maori leaders. Those young people who take part achieve a mana among their own people which far outweighs the original

concept of the contest.

When the kaumatua speak of pride, it is the young participants in the contests who help provide that for other maori people. They show that the language is a living, vital and growing part of our way of life, befitting praise and not the indifference heaped up on it. The maori language is the new torch of learning. The support given it by the new Government is one symbol of that recognition. But one young person's view best sums up the worth of the contests and the challenge of the maori language.

Martin Simeon, the first South Island student to win a maori speech contest, has a new pride in himself and for his people, since beginning to learn the language at the Te Kotahitanga Club when he was 10.

"It makes me feel that I'm not useless — I'm not this colour for nothing," Martin says pointing to his strong brown legs. "By learning maori I'm doing something special to preserve and revive the language. It's shown me who I am and what we all have to do to maintain our traditions. It's mine. It is my own."

Martin considers himself something of a purist as far as the language is concerned. He is not happy with what he terms the "transliteration" of the maori language where english words are wedded to maori to become more

modern. "That's not so real is it?" he says.

No coincidence

It was no coincidence that Martin chose the topic "Teach maori in the homes" for his winning entry in the contest at Whangarei last year.

It was his mother, Mrs Pikimai Simeon, who encouraged the family group to attend Te Kotahinga Club in 1978.

"Mum just said one day — 'It's time we did something different' — and off we went. Gee it felt strange then. I was only 10 and I was a bit scared. Now we all use maori at home a lot. I guess I'm pretty fluent now," Martin says.

Martin gets as much joy from seeing other people succeed in the language as he does in his own success.

One of his schoolmates, Watson Ohia, won a section in the regional finals for the 1984 contests.

Martin, who said he was "pretty keen" on mathematics, science and english — and "oh gee, maori" — has not made up his mind on what he would like to do when he leaves school.

"Perhaps I'll be a teacher. That's a possibility, I guess a real possibility."

His teachers at Aranui High School would agree, for they see Martin's earnest pursuit of his own language as a key to a remarkable insight into people generally.

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