

TE RITA PAPESCH

Kapa Haka in the 21st century: Reaching past the ‘powers that be’ to grow the art form

In this paper I will explore what is it in Kapa Haka (Māori Performing Arts) that maintains or retains ‘old ways of knowing’ where, instead, it could present itself today in ‘new ways of doing’. The question arises: Why, in this ‘new’ age of Kapa Haka, do Kapa Haka tutors and performers insist on reproducing onstage, components of ‘old’ tikanga marae (customary marae practices)? Is it because some tutors and performers have not yet reconciled with the fact that Kapa Haka taken to the stage is theatre and therefore opens the way for a performance that is not based on tikanga? Why, in this millennium, are the same judging processes of Te Matatini¹ that have been in place for some forty years still being maintained. Why have we not explored further and implemented a new competitive judging system?

The National Kapa Haka competition is almost a half a century old now. Yet there is still hesitance on the part of some rohe (area) representatives, tutors and judges to bring Kapa Haka completely into the 21st century in terms of what is produced for the onstage performance. What holds them back? In their book *The Knowing-Doing Gap*, Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) state: ‘People in many organisations are remarkably skilled at making excuses about why something cannot be done, why something will not work, and why the present condition is better than trying something new and actually implementing new knowledge or ideas’ (46). They go on to say: ‘Sharing information [. . .] entails giving up the

¹ Te Matatini is the current name for the national Kapa Haka competitive festival.

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power and prestige that comes from knowing things that others don't' (55). Having myself been a performer, tutor, rohe representative, judge at both regional and national levels, and radio and television commentator, I have often been in a position to ponder these questions and have also, at times, raised them for discussion in the appropriate forums. More often than not, I never gained much mileage or traction in any discussion where these questions were posed. Pfeffer and Sutton give me some way of unlocking the answers as to why there seems to be so much resistance from the top to new ways of doing Kapa Haka. There needs to be more contribution from beyond the 'powers that be' for us to begin to grow the art form now.

Is change a coming?

In 2003, the national Kapa Haka festival was suspended due to financial concerns. A new Chairperson was elected from within the delegates' committee who quickly set about proposing new foci for judging processes for the 2005 festival, amongst other things. A number of us hoped that this was heralding a new time of moving forward, but we soon discovered this was not going to be the case. I was one of the group of six current judges who were brought together to come up with criteria for all judges to follow. There was a mix of young and old, judges from a variety of iwi, and also a judge who was a lawyer by profession to make sure no libellous statements were contained in the final document. The booklet was written in Te Reo Māori with a glossary to help those whose reo was not as advanced as others. Within each category, phrases to identifying different aspects of judging were inserted for judges to be able to quickly choose what was appropriate in order to share their points of view, so saving time and energy. In support of this new process for pre-written phrase use, we referred to the plastic flip cards that judges of Te Hui Ahurei of Tūhoe used. We figured that if native speakers of Te Reo Māori were comfortable using this process it would be well received by the wider judging fraternity.

The booklet was presented to a forum of judges who had been selected for the 2005 festival along with that year's delegates and team tutors. It provoked much heated discussion amongst those in attendance. The basis of the strongest argument was that some judges did not want to be dictated to by others especially when it came to giving

cognisance to tribal differences in dialect; in particular, tutors did not want to be confined to any prescription for performance. In this, the booklet was treated as an imposition, when in our view it had been constructed as a guideline, a context within which individual judges could make their own call in acknowledging tribal differences. It was ironic to be on the receiving end of so much resistance given that, in the tutors' case, the guidelines had been compiled because teams had continually been asking for some kind of consistency in judging.

For us, it was also important to relieve judges from having to write endless comments as to why marks had been given or taken away. Therefore, a system of recording judges' voices as the performance was taking place was introduced. A new recording machine was purchased, at much expense, and was scrutinised and practised on by the small group of judges writing the new criteria booklet. On conclusion of the performances the recordings were to be captured in digital form with a CD to be given to each team along with their mark sheets. It was decided that a shadow group of judges would be appointed to trial both the device and the new criteria at the 2005 festival. However, due to technical difficulties with all those doing the television coverage that were not ironed out prior to the festival, the trial of the device did not go ahead. Nor was there explicit recourse to the booklet. It seemed both simply disappeared into a 'black hole'.

At the same time, though, there was much innovation happening on the periphery of the national competition, and regardless, Te Matatini was able to grow its own economy from within its own pursuits. A new Chairperson was appointed to oversee the 2009 festival competition at Tauranga; however, there was no further movement in the judging space. For the 2011 Te Matatini at Gisborne, judges were asked to use a computer to input marks directly to the collators after each group's performance, which at least made the recording of judges' comments easier.

Having attended all (bar one) of the national festival competitions since their inception in 1972, I can remember that there were criteria for judging compiled for the first Polynesian Festival, as it was called back then. (I'm happy to share a copy upon request.) The criteria are surprisingly specific; judges are asked to look at how the whole body moves from head to toe and so on. And it's not that there are not rules now. In a booklet entitled Ngā Ture o te Whakataetae –

Competition Rules',² there is information on how marks are to be accorded in terms of totals, benchmarks and the use of the Olympic system in which four judges judging a single item have their marks combined and the top and bottom marks are removed with the two remaining marks being added together and an average of those two marks being the final score given. However, nowhere within that booklet are there any guidelines for how judges are to actually view and mark the performances of each item. It seems like a 'free for all' still reigns! Everything remains in the perception of the individual judge and could be as diverse from any other's viewpoint as it wants to be.

In preparing this paper, I interviewed a couple of tutors and judges for their comments in relation to current judging processes.³ I first asked them why we have not explored further and implemented a new judging system in terms of items performed and how they should be judged. Then I asked how, in the absence of a formal system, marks are accorded. Participant 1 replied:

Whenever I have been placed in a judging role at regional level or secondary national's level our judging format is already prescribed for us so I have had little input in this area. I have not been a delegate to the national forum which would have allowed me to give input in to this area. But my own opinion is that looking at our judging and marking system is long overdue. The national competition is huge and takes days. Judges are not only required to have kaupapa knowledge based in kapa haka but to have physical and mental stamina. All of these need to be taken in to account and a less time-consuming process for judging needs to be considered.

Participant 2 replied:

We have long since proposed and used what we call the Olympic System, but in fact we do not use the actual Olympic System where the top mark anyone can achieve is 10 out of 10. It was proposed one year at the national table but pretty well 'cried out'. I believe the application of this method is feasible because the festival is broken down in to three pools out of which three teams make the finals making nine teams in total. Most pools comprise of up to eighteen teams leaving it much easier to pick three top teams using 10 out of 10 rather than 100 out of a 100 as a score base. Rather than judges

² See <https://www.tematatini.co.nz/>.

³ Both participants prefer to remain anonymous.

having to write out pages of comments to substantiate marks given or taken off, aspect judging could be provided and selected to support the marking process therefore cutting down writing time and energy.

This is an area where I think processes are antiquated, more so than those concerning ritual.

Ritual from marae to stage

You can take my tikanga from my marae to the stage, but don't bring the stage to my marae.

Te Ruruhe John Rangahau (1994)

Unfortunately for me, even though I knew Te Ruruhe personally, I never had cause to ask him what he meant by this statement. He was a well-known composer of contemporary and traditional waiata and haka within Tūhoe and Waikato and beyond. He was not opposed to being involved in contemporary stage productions and the like, and he also composed and tutored many kapa haka, including Ngā Rākei Raukura, who represented Tainui at the National Haka Competitions held in Hawera, Taranaki, in 1994. When I contemplate both sides of his statement, I am left wondering how supportive he was either way.

His father, Te Rangiāniwaniwa John Rangahau, was a judge from the first festival until the 1990s and was quite a 'stickler' for maintaining the 'right way' of doing things in terms of haka. I was one of the lucky ones to be tutored by him in the art of mau patu, so had a small insight into how he thought in terms of tikanga marae and tikanga of performance. If one was going to present a karanga or a whaikōrero on stage, then he insisted there were still certain protocols to be followed: for example, where one stood when was delivering a karanga or whaikōrero, and how consideration would be given as to who was the correct person to do so. When these customary practices are performed on the stage today, it is difficult to recognise any particular protocol or tikanga or guidelines in place; you just get the performance as it eventuates. Perhaps this could be considered a space where people have reached beyond the 'powers that be' in order to move forward comfortably into the new millennium of Kapa Haka.

In order to get a feeling for the thoughts of current national festival tutors and performers on tikanga marae

performed on the stage, I asked: Why did they think national competitive teams insist on maintaining ritual roles on stage, such as *whaikōrero* and *karanga*, that are better suited for our *marae*? The first participant said: 'Whaikōrero was maintained in order to allow the group to pay homage to the reason for the competition and also to pay respect to the *tangata whenua*, local people'. Participant 2 replied:

I encourage the *karanga* because it showcases our *kaitātaki wahine* and my *kōrero* before most items is not necessarily *whaikōrero* as per that on the *marae*. It is usually just introductory to what follows. But I agree in that it is still ritualistic.

I then asked: If *Kapa Haka* taken to the stage is theatrical and therefore has opened the way for a performance to not be based on *tikanga marae*, why continue along the lines of *tikanga marae*? Participant 1 told me that when he was a member of the Kahurangi Dance Theatre Company they did not follow the *tikanga* of the *marae per se* but still did *karanga*. However this was related to the *kaupapa* of the performance only. Participant 2 answered my question by saying that 'the theatricality of performance is always present on stage whether it is based in ritual processes or not. For me it is still a natural occurrence rather than highly orchestrated'.

Final thoughts

Te Matatini takes place next year in 2019 in Wellington city. It will be nearly a half a century, 47 years to be exact, since the first national *Kapa Haka* competition, then called the Polynesian Festival, took place at Rotorua. After taking in to consideration my participants' responses and my own personal experiences as a performer, composer, tutor, TV and radio commentator and judge, I am still left pondering as to what is the best way forward, if in fact we can make the national committee see that it is time to move forward more thoughtfully with regard to the shape of the performance and the way it is to be judged. There is so much innovation taking place at school, *hapū* and regional level competitions that currently has no place for consideration at national level competitions. Some activities being brought on to the stage in these spaces sit outside of, not only ritual practices on the *marae*, but also what is currently acceptable on the national competitive stage at any level. This is how and where the theatricality of Māori performance could have a free reign. We have seen Māori kites, *wharenui* facades, cow hides, bells,

drums, guns, dead pigs, and mānuka brooms being used to further explain or enhance a performance piece on the Kapa Haka stage, but we have not had any public report or insight as to how these additions were received or marked by judges.

I recently attended an inter-house haka competition at a local Wharekura and the local regional Primary Schools' haka competition. The houses are named after four Māori prophets – Te Whiti o Rongomai, Te Kooti Rikirangi, Ratana and Tāwhiao. When Ratana entered they wore parts of the garb of the Ratana bands and the Apotoro of that faith and featured a trumpet player that can be found as a member of a Ratana band. At the Primary Schools' regional competitions one particular team played the spoons and strummed the ukulele. We have seen the ukulele on the stage before as stringed instruments (and traditional Māori musical instruments) are allowed according to the rules of haka competition. However, as yet no one has ever been brave enough or innovative enough to have used the spoons.

References

Pfeffer, Jeffrey and Robert I. Sutton. *The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publ., 2000.

Dr Te Rita Bernadette Papesch is of Waikato-Maniapoto, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Whakaue and Czech descent. Her family encouraged her to pursue education and a musical career, which began with studying classical European piano and singing. Personal circumstances meant a change in direction to studying Māori music under the guidance of her family, Canon Wi Te Tau Huata, Dr. Hirini Melbourne and Dr. Timoti Kāretu, plus many others. Kapa Haka is her passion; she has been a performer, tutor, composer, regional and national judge, and commentator. She now sits as the matriarch, sometimes composer and tutor and guide in tikanga, to her children and grandchildren's Kapa Haka group, Te Haona Kaha. Dr Papesch currently lectures in the Master of Applied Indigenous Knowledge degree at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.