Māori Medium Teachers: Getting the Professional Development they Need

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ABSTRACT

In 2007, the Ministry of Education commissioned an evaluation of three Māori medium junior reading series: He Purapura, Ngā Kete Kōrero *and* He Kohikohinga. *Questionnaires were completed by 84 teachers in Level 1, 81-100% immersion Māori settings, and semi-structured focus group interviews were undertaken with 15 teachers and 14 literacy experts. Two case studies and a review of texts were also undertaken. This article explores an emerging theme from the evaluation data around professional development (PD). Teachers and literacy experts identified several key features important for effective PD, including the quality of pre- and in-service education, second language acquisition training and PD that is tailored to meet the teachers' needs. The findings indicate that teachers should have access to ongoing opportunities to develop their pedagogical and content knowledge and to have sufficient training in the use and implementation of reading resources and their support materials after they are distributed to schools.*

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Ministry of Education commissioned an evaluation of three Māori medium junior reading series: *He Purapura, Ngā Kete Kōrero and He Kohikohinga*. Raising Māori achievement is an important goal for the Ministry of Education (e.g., Education Review Office, 2010) and is articulated in the Māori Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2005), where the Ministry commits to working in ways to ensure Māori success in education. In commissioning this project, the Ministry of Education sought to identify the strengths and areas for improvement of the reading series to extend students' comprehension. The aim of the evaluation was to identify best teaching and learning strategies and interventions practised by competent teachers using the *He Purapura* and *Ngā Kete Kōrero* series with students across the schooling years 1–4 and *He Kohikohinga* series across schooling years 3–5. This information would lead to improving the publication of high quality reading materials to support and raise the reading achievement of young Māori students.

The evaluation study combined Kaupapa Māori methodology with Western research methodology and utilised a mixed method approach of questionnaires, semi-structured focus group interviews, case studies, and

reviews of texts.   An important emerging theme from the evaluation was the need for more PD for teachers in Māori medium settings.

The evaluation gathered information from teachers in Māori medium and literacy advisers on the usefulness of each series, their limitations, and any possible areas for improvement. The evaluation made recommendations for consideration including the extent to which the three series:

- stimulate students' interest and motivation to read;
- cover a variety of genre;
- include high interest titles; and
- consider gender issues, particularly in light of findings about Māori boys' achievement in literacy.

Irrespective of the quality of the readers themselves, this article uses findings from the evaluation data to consider: (i) whether the teachers using them have had sufficient professional development (PD) to do so; and, (ii) whether the conditions that teachers face in their schools were conducive to their professional knowledge about the use of the materials. It identifies issues that teachers face within Level 1, 81–100 percent immersion Māori medium settings. The discussion draws on national and international research in PD, literacy and second language acquisition.

EVALUATION METHOD

The project team comprised five researchers from Te Kura Māori and two advisers from He Parekereke – the Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Institute – and the Jessie Hetherington Centre for Educational Research located within Victoria University of Wellington. A roopū matua (senior reference group) of literacy experts also advised the team in terms of Māori medium literacy issues.

The participant groups were selected to provide information from different perspectives: from those teaching in the classroom; from those who had taught in the target setting and now assist as facilitators with expertise in the area of literacy; and, from those who provide PD in the area of Māori literacy achievement – a total of 14 experts and 15 teachers.

Questionnaires, semi-structured focus group interviews, case studies and reviews of texts were used to gather data. Questionnaires were sent to teachers of students in years 1–5 in Level 1 Māori medium educational settings including 24 bilingual schools/ classrooms, 67 Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori language immersion schools where the philosophy and practice reflect Māori cultural values with the aim of revitalising Māori language, knowledge and culture), and 17 special character Kura Māori (Māori immersion schools). Forty-four questionnaires were returned.

Six case studies were planned involving careful observation of lessons using the series. Due to unforeseen circumstances, only two case studies were undertaken observing two teachers during their reading lessons.

The evaluation team was expected to review 12 books from each series and create a framework for reviewing and analysing these Māori medium texts. The framework was informed by the research literature, the research questions and the teaching experience of the researchers.

OVERALL EVALUATION FINDINGS

The overall findings indicate that Māori medium settings are better supported in terms of the quantity and quality of reading material than had been the case in previous studies (Bishop, Berryman & Richardson, 2002; Hohepa 1999). However, the study identified issues and concerns that remain regarding the resources currently available for teachers working in Level 1, 81–100% immersion Māori settings.

These issues and concerns are reflected in the emerging themes from the evaluation:

- PD for the implementation and use of the resources;

- the creation of a readily accessible data-base and catalogue;

- sets of series that give examples of different dialects, styles, genre and types;

- more consistent levelling for both literacy and te reo Māori; and,

- a wider range of reading material within the levels to support students' reading mileage or practice of skills learnt.

The evaluation findings indicated overall satisfaction with each of the reading series. Both literacy experts and teachers suggested how the series could be improved and what support resources and systems could be created to assist teachers to use them. The researchers' reviews of 12 books from each series revealed the need to create a robust framework that allows a consistent review and enables critical analysis of texts to support teachers in making informed choices of text.

The case studies revealed that the main focus of the teachers was on word development within the context of the stories. The question then arises of how teachers who are second language learners use and interact with the reading material compared to their native speaker colleagues, especially if neither group have had PD in teaching reading and literacy.

There was little evaluation data in the area of gender and language acquisition. The questionnaire data showed that teachers did not perceive these two areas as a priority. Further investigation was recommended to determine if gender is an issue for reading achievement in Māori medium as it has been shown to be in English medium. Research as to how far second language acquisition teacher pedagogical knowledge impacts on language learning was also recommended.

The remainder of this article considers the evaluation findings in respect of professional development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This part of the paper asks the question: What opportunities exist for teachers to continue to develop the skills and culturally appropriate pedagogical content knowledge required to support our students and their families to become literacy experts?

Quality pre-service and in-service education

Teachers commented on the lack of pre-service and in-service PD to equip them to develop and facilitate quality literacy programmes that would affect their students' literacy success and achievement:

> He taiapa hoki te pre-service. *Pre-service is also a barrier.*
> (Teacher)

> Pre-service, itiiti noa ngā māramatanga e pā ana ki te pedagogical content knowledge. *Very little pre-service training in relation to pedagogical content knowledge.*
> (Teacher)

> Ka āhua toremi i roto i ngā akomanga. *They sort of drown in the classrooms.*
> (Teacher)

Inconsistencies in pre-service education for teachers was also noted by literacy experts in the study. This reiterates the findings of the Toi Huarewa report (Bishop *et al*., 2002) which discussed the poor quality of education in all aspects of literacy and therefore the limited ability of teachers in Māori medium settings to provide effective literacy programmes.

According to the literacy experts in the study, other aspects that impacted on the amount of PD teachers received included the types of funding that schools had access to and the wide range of levels in one class. Limited teacher reliever numbers in schools, rural isolation and the travelling distance to attend PD are other issues that have reportedly prevented teachers from accessing PD (Te Maro, Averill & Higgins, 2008).

In response to limited teaching reliever numbers in Māori medium schools and heightened by a dearth of language specialists, a group of academics from Victoria University of Wellington has used a novel approach to teacher PD (McKenzie, Toia & McRae, 2010). A model using video podcasts, online support and in-school facilitation was developed to advance areas of Māori language and language acquisition amongst teachers. While still in its relative infancy, the model continues to grow because it addresses some of the issues previously discussed by teachers and literacy experts in terms of PD.

Second language acquisition education

The need for second language acquisition education for teachers at both the pre-service and in-service level was a further finding of this study. Some implications were that teachers were expected to accelerate learning in the second language (of the teacher or the students) in the same timeframe as mainstream with fewer people and material resources.

The Whakapiki i te Reo programme (McKenzie *et al*., 2010) has provided an alternative approach to PD in the area of te reo Māori proficiency development and second language acquisition for Māori medium teachers. With the utilisation of the iPod in this programme, issues such as teacher relief and rural isolation can be addressed, enabling learners to participate in the learning programme at their convenience. As a PD tool, it expands opportunities teachers have to strengthen their understanding of the subjects they teach and widen the repertoire of the instructional strategies they use (Pasnik, 2007).

Tailored PD programmes

It has been argued that PD programmes need to be tailored to the teaching and learning needs of the teachers and their students (Scrimshaw, 2004). Some teachers in this study reported that the PD they were involved in did not meet their needs as teachers in Māori medium educational settings. For example:

> The system stinks. That's why they are where they are at. Too many demands on our kaiako. Needs to be taken into account.
> (Teacher)

Daly and colleagues (2009a) also support tailoring PD to teachers' needs and state: 'Teachers need to be at the centre of their own learning if they are to change their deep-seated beliefs and habits' (p. 6). According to Timperley and colleagues (2007), a challenge for PD providers, particularly when calling for substantial changes in practice, is to not only supply teachers with new and effective ways of teaching but also to convince them that these would improve the learning outcomes for students.

Pasnik (2007) has stated that PD is effective when it is sustained, intensive and continuously woven into the everyday fabric of the teaching and this is achieved through modelling, coaching, and collaborations. Successful PD builds in opportunities for critical reflection where teachers can be proactive in deciding how their practice can be improved rather than being passively reactive to a new initiative (Daly *et al*., 2009b).

More specifically, repeated opportunities for teachers to encounter, understand, translate, and refine new theories and related practices are important factors for effective PD in literacy (Timperley *et al*., 2007). Successful implementation of new approaches to literacy also includes the degree to which teachers understand and share the goals and understandings presented in the PD, the opportunity to work in professional learning communities with others who share the same goals and face the same challenges, and the availability of mutually accepted evidence of the effectiveness of the new approaches (Timperley *et al*., 2007).

Pedagogical and content knowledge training

Both literacy experts and teachers in the study pointed out the need to have PD programmes that focus on pedagogical and content knowledge for the teaching of reading. The assertion is that while the quality and usefulness of the materials is important, teachers need to have a full understanding of why they are choosing specific reading material and how to engage children with texts and comprehension tasks, if it is to have any effect. Literacy experts place

importance on the need for teachers to motivate, engage and excite children into reading while teachers tend to emphasise the need for resources to assist planning, activities and reading progressions.

Timperley and colleagues (2007) state that professional learning plays a key role in improving teacher effectiveness and practice, thereby increasing student achievement. On-going PD can also empower teachers to address the challenges they face in their everyday teaching and to meet demands for teacher and school accountability (Vrasidas & Glass, 2007).

> It comes to professional knowledge and for what purposes [teachers are using the books]. Teacher knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, being able to see [the books] for their purposes.
> (Literacy expert)

> No resource can band-aid the professional knowledge of a kaiako.
> (Literacy expert)

Teachers indicated how they could be assisted in their reading programmes by having certain tools and resources available, such as ready-made activities, exemplars and models of good teaching and teaching progressions, assistance to plan objectives, and learning intentions and guides showing learning progressions. This is consistent with what the literacy experts asked for in terms of teachers having access and opportunity to develop their pedagogical content knowledge. The Ministry of Education (2003) supports this argument, stating: 'Teachers need an extensive and continually developing knowledge of theoretical and research base about teaching, learning and the process of becoming literate' (p. 13). Consistent with the Ministry's view that teachers also need to be aware that their ability to connect to each learner and inspire them with a love of learning is at the heart of good teaching and learning, one participant stated:

> [It is up to the teachers to] … bring out potential [of the material] and bring reading alive for kids to enjoy.
> (Literacy expert)

The literacy experts were hesitant to support ready-made reading activities, reasoning that activities can be misused without training in the underlying pedagogical content knowledge needed to make good use of them. Consequently, the danger is that they become exercises that keep students busy rather than tools for teaching and learning.

Support with the use of materials and resources

Teachers stated that expertise in resource use and implementation made a difference as to how well the resources were used or not. In that vein, teachers were asking for more quality teaching models and support materials. The Literacy Taskforce report (Education Review Office, 1999) has stated that teachers need more assistance than is currently available with the implementation and use of reading materials provided. This includes more detail to help teachers to select and use appropriate instructional approaches and strategies.

Sets of series that follow themes or exemplars of dialects, styles, genre and types of themes and reading materials readily accessible through an online database and catalogue were identified needs by the literacy experts and teachers in this study. Teachers also stated the need for a broad range of material at each level to support students' reading mileage. This view is shared by the Literacy Taskforce (Education Review Office 1999) who stated the need for a variety of interesting and stimulating material in a range of media and appropriate to the instructional levels to enhance children's print and phonological awareness.

Teachers and literacy experts identified the need for the levelling of materials to be more consistent for both literacy and Māori language. In 1999, the Literacy Taskforce had recommended that priority be given to positioning te reo Māori readers to fit Ngā Kete Kōrero framework levels (levels 1 to 3). This continues to be an issue today according to the teachers and literacy experts in this study.

CONCLUSION

In terms of PD findings from the evaluation study, teachers and literacy experts working in Māori medium educational settings identified several features important for effective PD. While there was an overall satisfaction with the number and quality of each reading series, the issue of strengthening PD calls for effective pre- and in-service education in pedagogical and content knowledge, implementation and use of reading resources and support materials, second language acquisition training and PD for the critical reflection of one's teaching practice.

A challenge for PD providers is to supply new models of teacher PD that meet the needs of teachers in Māori medium settings. Innovations such as Whakapiki i te Reo are argued to offer viable alternatives for teachers in these unique settings. Digital technologies can be used to increase knowledge and understanding of effective literacy practice and second language acquisition, enabling teachers to participate in the learning programme at their convenience.

In order to help teachers develop effective programmes, there is an ongoing need for a variety of interesting and stimulating te reo Māori materials that are levelled to fit the existing *Ngā Kete Kōrero* framework and are accessible via an online database and catalogue.

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