



Focus principles: integration of language and culture; genuine social interaction; comparisons and connections

Focus key competencies: relating to others; using language, symbols, and texts

Context

Tamara teaches **Te Reo Māori** (Māori language) as an integral part of her programme with a Year 8 class at an intermediate school in the South Island. All the students at Tamara's school learn a language other than English, although, with the programmes based on each teacher's interest and expertise, there is wide variability in the languages taught and the approaches used. While she is a first language speaker of English, Tamara identifies strongly as Māori (her father's heritage). She has beginner-survival level ability in te reo Māori, and is continuing to learn Māori language and tikanga (values and practices). She also knows some basic French (from high school), Samoan (her mother's heritage), and New Zealand Sign Language (personal interest), and uses smatterings of all these languages as she teaches. Tamara and her students also learn Korean with a native speaker for 40 minutes each week.

Tamara emphasises that she is “hugely passionate about te ao Māori – the Māori world.” She brings this into her classroom by “embedding Māori across the curriculum” so that “it becomes part of everyday things.” For example, Māori words for colours are used in descriptive writing, and Māori flax kites provide the context for a science investigation into flight. For Tamara, “any subject that you are teaching – there is always a [Māori] component you can weave in.” Having had very little language teaching pedagogy when she did her teacher education, this approach is based on Tamara's own beliefs, rather than any particular language teaching theory. With regard to enhancing intercultural appreciation, Tamara is aware that her class is “quite eclectic in terms of backgrounds, ethnicities, and what the students actually identify [as].” Thinking back to the beginning of this project, Tamara recalled: “I was nervous, as my approach is definitely not the ‘norm’

when it comes to teaching languages.” She was somewhat reassured, then, when she found she could make “instant connections” between the way she teaches and some of the Newton, et al. (2010) intercultural principles that underpin the inquiries in this project.

Planning the inquiry

Tamara wanted to focus her inquiry on the integration of language and culture (Newton, et al.’s Principle 1). She also stressed that, for her, making connections (Principle 4) was hugely important. Tamara wanted to do more than just encourage her students to compare and contrast different cultures. She also encouraged them to construct personal connections with Māori words, and she would use te ao Māori concepts to help her students to make connections with each other within their diverse class and school setting. Tamara chose te ao kori (the world of movement) as the intercultural theme for her inquiry. This connected to the science investigation the class had been doing on flight, and would also link to the New Zealand bird focus that she had planned for later in the year. The class enjoyed being outdoors, and Tamara was comfortable with “using reo through P.E.,” so she identified two traditional Māori games (kī-o-rahi and tapu ae) that could be used as contexts to extend her students’ understandings of Māori culture, and practise new vocabulary. The PE context enabled her to “physically demonstrate what the kupu (word) is,” and could also “act as an excellent prompt for the students.” Her goal was to have her learners “being able to use Māori without realising that ‘I’ve used Māori’ – so making it a normal everyday thing.”

Kī-o-rahi and tapu ae also had rich potential as foundations for discussions about games and activities that have origins in other cultures – something Tamara planned for. In addition, she planned to make use of resources produced for the recent national Māori Language Week, which focused on phrases to inspire people and cheer them on. Tamara also recognised that, through the inquiry, she could maintain a focus on developing key competencies, particularly ‘relating to others’. However, with only second-hand knowledge herself of how kī-o-rahi and tapu ae are played, she needed to enlist help to introduce the games to her students.



Field set-up for traditional Māori

Inquiry in action

When the inquiry began, Tamara’s class was already underway with an independent ‘ladder’ challenge to learn a set of kiwaha (colloquial expressions). These included sports side-line encouragements, such as Hopukina! (Catch it!), Ānana! (That’s it), and Ka mau te wehi! (That’s outstanding!). A few of the students carried flashcards to help reinforce these new phrases. Other Māori words and phrases were on the walls and on objects around the classroom.

For the first lesson, Tamara arranged for a traditional Māori games facilitator, Julie (pseudonym), to teach the class how to play kī-o-rahi. Tamara explained: “the story behind kī-o-rahi is all about taniwha (powerful creatures) and hunting and things like that. It’s based on a Māori perception of how creatures move.” Julie’s explanation of the taniwha myth then provided a cultural context for how the game evolved. As they played, the students had opportunities to use the kiwaha they had been learning.

Tamara started the next lesson with some kiwaha on the whiteboard as a reminder for students before they headed outside to where cones were set out to play tapu ae. Julie made cultural links as she explained that the game is related to Māori warfare. Interspersing Māori words in her English explanations, she described how, just as with Māori at war, there are defenders and attackers and runners (each with a particular area on the field), and how, during pā (fortified village) wars, the warriors would protect their women and babies (represented by tennis balls on small upturned cones within a circle at each end of the playing area).



Cones set out to play tapu ae.

As a warm up, the class followed the instructions that Julie gave in a mix of English and Māori, slapping their thighs and clapping hands to a Māori chant. Julie continued seamlessly ‘peppering’ her English explanation with Māori words as she went through the rules for tapu ae. The students and Tamara played the game enthusiastically, passing the ball through each third of the court and trying to knock the ‘babies’ out of their ‘nests’. Mostly they used English as they called out to their team-mates, with some occasional bursts of Māori, such as “Oma, oma!” (Run/escape!), and Ānana!

The intercultural focus on te ao kori continued in the next lesson, with a discussion of the movements in a range of activities, including Irish dancing, Siva Tau (Samoan war dance), and striking a piñata. Tamara introduced the Māori words for ‘left’ and ‘right’ to help students describe some of the movements. She continued her cross-curricular approach

as she taught the students some yoga poses with “a Māori spin”; the ‘flower pose’ became the ‘putiputi pose’, and links were made between the sacredness of the head for Māori people and in some other cultures. The discussion expanded to how the yoga poses “can actually affect your hauora (wellbeing)” and “all the different ‘well-beings’ there are.”

The next lesson was preceded by a short karate session with visiting teachers - part of a whole school ‘taster’ programme. Tamara capitalised on this as an opportunity for further intercultural exploration and reflection. The students were prompted beforehand to recall Māori words they could use during karate. When they returned to class, the students discussed links between karate moves and the movements in yoga and the Māori games they had played. Māori words for prepositions of place (e.g., roto/inside, muri/behind, mauī/left) were sometimes interwoven into the students’ discussions.

Reflecting on the inquiry

Tamara’s main focus had been on integrating language and culture in the context of playing games. This included looking at “the values behind why Māori had these games” and “the purpose behind them,” and then “a little bit of the tikanga and the culture and ... relating it back to childhood games that the kids had played.” For Tamara, this was about “how you can actually get language in there without the kids realising.” She explained that the students were “drawing on everything” and “making connections.” In other words, rather than treating te reo Māori as a discrete subject in an allotted time, it became “part of our kaupapa ... part of what we do. Tamara believed that this “normalisation” of Māori would lead to her students’ language learning being “almost like an osmosis thing.” Indeed, some of the students appeared to be aware that Māori words were being seamlessly embedded into all their learning. One student reported: “We don’t even really know we are doing it because we are using it so much.”

In terms of the students’ engagement with diversity and relating to others, Tamara noted that the games had provided opportunities for genuine social interactions that incorporated te reo Māori. She also perceived that the students were making connections between what they were doing in Māori and people from a range of different cultures. This might include people from other cultures within the class, or connecting more to students’ own heritage and extended families.

Tamara was mindful to take care that her intercultural provocations were not just related to Māori. She had often probed and made links across a wide range of cultures and perspectives. She was able to exemplify some ‘aha’ moments as her students were prompted to reflect on pre-conceived ideas. One of these occurred when the yoga poses were taught with Māori names. She recalled some of the students “had this stereotype that yoga was for Indian people or mums in tights.” Tamara could see that, through the intercultural focus, the class reflected on ideas that they might otherwise not have engaged with. She concluded that “looking at things differently” was a key thing she had achieved with her class during the inquiry.

Challenges in practice

A significant challenge for Tamara – and one that she has in common with many other teachers of languages in primary schools in New Zealand – is that she is teaching a language and culture which she is still learning herself. She is very open about this with her students. In fact, they are very willing helpers. As a need arises during lessons, students often look up a word Tamara may not know, usually doing this quickly and without necessarily being asked. However, Tamara’s beginner-survival level of proficiency in the target language means that her students are not being regularly exposed to extended stretches of input in te reo Māori. Additionally, most of their input is oral, and the written form is somewhat neglected. At this stage, the students’ output mostly mirrors Tamara’s, with te reo Māori words and formulaic phrases being integrated within predominantly English sentences.

When planning the inquiry, Tamara was very open about the occasional need to seek cultural expertise beyond the school. Tamara was very proactive in “tapping into the resources” needed to support her. This might mean requesting favours from the Māori community, or negotiating with her school for funding to pay for help. In Tamara’s view, bringing in an expert to teach traditional Māori games is comparable to “having a specialist netball coach come in,” in that reimbursement may be required. Accordingly, it is necessary to be willing to have those potentially difficult conversations about funding, if required. Nevertheless, the opportunity to connect with others in the community was “incredibly powerful, in terms of my practice, recognising my limits and working with others to teach my students and myself.”

Final lessons learned

Despite the challenges of not being an expert in Māori language and culture, Tamara teaches these with passion and enthusiasm. This example of practice illustrates an advantage Tamara has that many specialist language teachers do not have – that is, she is with the same class, all day, every school day. This means she is able to make the most of genuine opportunities to make intercultural comparisons and connections, both planned and ‘in the moment’, across all the learning areas. A key for Tamara has been recognising and being open about her own limitations, and embracing support as a valuable opportunity to continue developing both her own and her students’ knowledge of te ao Māori. Thinking about the year ahead, Tamara concluded:

I look forward to revisiting some of my previous lessons ... I plan on using my Te Ao Māori approach in order to embed Māori across the curriculum as well as developing Māori in a written form. How this will look, I am not sure just yet!

Discussion starters: a focus on integration

Despite not being fluent in te reo Māori, Tamara frequently embedded ‘snippets’ of Māori language and culture within her teaching – regardless of what the ‘subject’ was at the time. To what extent do you think this could work in your own context? Tamara expressed some misgivings about not teaching the written form of the target language. Would this be a concern for you? How important do you think reading and writing in the target language is (compared to listening and speaking) when students are just starting out?

In what ways might teaching te reo Māori be different to teaching other languages (such as Chinese or Spanish) in a New Zealand school? What are the potential opportunities and obstacles in each case?

Key Resource

Newton, J., Yates, E., Shearn, S., & Nowitzki, W. (2010). *Intercultural Communicative Language Teaching: Implications for effective teaching and learning - a literature review and an evidence-based framework for effective teaching*. Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Education.

Jocelyn Howard and Adèle Scott were the authors of this Engaging Example of Practice.