

Language and Learning: Language Learning

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1.0 Introduction

Language is fundamental and critical to learning, and the use of the language that children bring to school or the language they are proficient in, is essential. Learners who are proficient in the language/s used for learning, have a much higher likelihood of achievements, and those who are not will most likely fail. The needed lift in the learning achievements of Pacific students in New Zealand education may lie in improved language proficiency.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore language acquisition pedagogies used in different learning environments to acquire twin proficiency in languages. These are aligned against the literature in New Zealand and abroad on language learning. These are further critiqued against finding of other studies to recommend what can be introduced, changed or revised to lifting Samoan students' learning achievements in New Zealand education.

3.0 Study Methodology

This study involved visits to different school sites that offer learning in other languages and/or learning of other languages. The visits were to observe teachers in actions and to gain understanding of language acquisition practices, teacher knowledge of language learning and identify aspects of the school and classroom pedagogies that impact positively on children's acquisition of twin proficiency in two or more languages. Students' interactions in targeted languages were observed, confirmed with teachers and leaders their proficiency levels in the languages used. There were conversations with teachers on the contents of the programme and aspects they considered most effective in gaining proficiency in the target languages.

4.0 A Brief Biography

I have been a principal since 1986 in rural and urban schools, in contributing and full primary schools.

The Maori immersion class at Strathmore Park School where I was principal from 1991-1997 and the Samoan immersion class established there in 1995 both used immersion methodologies for acquiring proficiency in two languages. Raetihi School from where I was the principal from 1998 to 2005, there were two reo Maori immersion classes at the school. I have been the principal at Petone Central since 2006 and it has a very strong immersion reo Maori unit with four classes.

5.0 Study Constraints

5.1 Lack of Credible Measures

There is a lack of credible tools to measure proficiency in Samoan, and in English for students who have come through immersion Samoan learning environments compared to those in mainstream.

Despite the fact that I consider myself proficient in both English and Samoan, the engagement of others throughout the study was deliberate. Teachers and team leaders in school visited had input in to assessing the students. Likewise, teachers and principals in

Maori immersion and Spanish immersion classes were invited to comment on proficiency levels of students in the targeted language and the dominant language.

6.0 Literature Search

My earlier study Esera (2001) *Acquisition of English Proficiency by Students from Samoan Speaking Homes: An Evaluative Study* found strongly in favour of immersion methodologies as the preferred pathway for Samoan students to achieve English proficiency. The achievements of students in immersion learning environments where Samoan was the language of instructions and interactions, the gradual introduction of English, and the use of dual medium methodologies was found to be most effective for Samoan students in gaining English proficiency as well as retention and development of Samoan language. The Samoan students in these environments were found to perform significantly better than those in bilingual and mainstream environments not only in gaining proficiency in English but also for acquiring age related competence in Samoan language for speaking, listening, reading and writing. There may have been other factors that contributed to the achievement of twin proficiency in both English and Samoan by the cohorts of students in that earlier study. My sabbatical project was to continue to explore and identify some of the factors critical to twin proficiency in languages.

The renowned underachievement of Pacific students in English was brought to the attention of the teaching fraternity in New Zealand since the early 1970s. Elley (1972) found that New Zealand European students especially girls were performing in the top quartile of all the students in international studies on literacy, while Pacific and Maori students formed the majority of the tail of under-achievements. Many international studies on literacy since then have had similar findings and the picture has not changed much since.

7.0 Data Gathering

7.1 Findlayson Park School

This school is one of the lead schools in Auckland in the use of heritage languages for learning purposes and for interactions in the classrooms and on the playground. It is a full primary school with a roll of 800 with established immersion units using Samoan and Maori for learning. It has recently opened two classes where Tongan is the language for learning. It has a bilingual English/Maori unit and mainstream classes where English is the language of instructions. I visited both the Ta'iala; the Samoan language unit and the Te Huringa Maori which is a Maori immersion unit.

7.1.1 Le Ta'iala

This is an immersion Samoan unit where Samoan is the language of instruction throughout the Unit from Year 1 to Year 8 and has eight classes. The apportioning of the use of Samoan and English is done throughout. At Year 1 there is a targeted 80% of the time where Samoan is used and 20% English. The observation focussed solely on the amount of time Samoan was used in each classroom observed and what percentage of the time was used for each language functions. The notes taken give some description of the learning activities in the class at the time, and some narrative on the classroom pedagogy and the environment.

Year Levels	Spoken	Listening	Writing	Reading	Total	Boys	Girls	Ethnicities
Year 1	100%	100%	40%	40%	14	6	8	1 half Maori/Samoa
Years 1 & 2	80%	100%	60%	0%	19	11	8	100% Samoan
Years 2 & 3	100%	100%	0%	0%	22	8	14	1 half Korean/Samoan
Years 5 & 6	95%	95%	0%	0%	25	13	12	100% Samoan

New Entrants

Teachers used mainly correct sentence structure in Samoan and good pronunciation in class. The knowledge of phonology among students was sound largely through teachers speaking correct language, and the use of different phrases when interacting with students. Students used mainly correct language using appropriate language for the request made. Students' courteous phrases and words expected. The use of 'fa'amolemole', fa'afetai, tulou and other phrases appropriate with those in the class. The interaction among students is a calculated 60% English and 40% Samoan. Teachers initiated conversation and interactions were only in Samoan.

The writing was letter formation and the reading was mainly phonic awareness sounding single letters, vowel combinations and consonant-vowel combinations. These were in cards that students used. The whole classroom was immersed in Samoan vocabulary with list of word starting in different letters of the Samoan alphabet. There is a guide of the six phases of pedagogy in the classroom that teachers follow when managing learning for students. There is a clear expectation that students are also given good guidance along the six phases of action learning; Filifiliga, Su'esu'ega, Fa'amaumauga, Fa'aaogaina, Fa'atinoga, Iloiloga. Their enquiry learning model is in phases as well; Fesili Taula'i, Fusiupu Fa'atupu Manatu, Fesili Mai Manatu. There is also the expectation that every classroom have learning intentions and success criteria.

There is a corner of English readers in the class, a very small corner occupying 2% of the floor space.

Years 1 & 2

The reliever was in the room and this appeared to have had an impact on the amount of Samoan spoken. The children were writing a lot as follow up activities of a text in English while the writing and interaction was in Samoan. The interaction between students were largely in English and with the interaction in Samoan mainly correct. The room is soaked in Samoan vocabulary starting with letters of the Samoan alphabet.

Years 2 & 3

The children had a lesson on place value and children were expected to read numbers in Samoan. The children were able to read numbers to tens of thousands correctly. The children were able to respond correctly. The children were asked to read numbers individually and then in groups. The children asked questions on the numbers of 1s, 10s, 100s, 1000s, in the numbers. The children had difficulties in reading one hundreds of thousands.

The teachers is a native speaker of Samoan and teacher initiated conversation were mainly in Samoan. English was used when talking on concepts of imaging. The children were reminded in Samoan language. Students responded correctly in Samoan. The room was soaked in Samoan vocabulary starting with letters of the Samoan alphabet as in other rooms.

TRANSITION

The introduction of English starts at Year 5. This is delivered through dividing the term into two equal halves with one language in one half and the other language for the other half. The reading level in English is age related, and the children coped well with the English text. The pedagogical approaches used when transitioning remain unchanged. The topic across the unit and curriculum requirements is the same across the unit. The 50/50 carry of language continue to Year 8.

Years 4 & 5

This conversation was mainly in Samoan with some translation, and mainly when some concepts need further clarification. The idea of ‘brainstorming’ was discussed in Samoan and the only English part of the class dialogue was when Pacific nations were discussed. New vocabulary in Samoan were expanded and the morphologies of key words in Samoan were clarified including compound word, syllable, sounds and the use of diacritical marks. Most of the prompts and reminding of expectation were in Samoan.

There were translations on the wall and also in verbal interactions in the classroom when understanding is compromised. The

Reading

Year Level	Above		At		Below	
	Samoan	English	Samoan	English	Samoan	English
5		56%		6%		38%
6		62%		14%		24%
7		71%		8%		21%
8		35%		29%		36%

7.1.2 Te Huringa Maori

This is an immersion Reo Maori unit where Reo Maori is the language of instruction throughout the Unit from Year 1 to Year 8. The apportioning of the use of Reo Maori and English is done throughout. At Year 1 there is a targeted 80% of the time where Reo Maori is used and 20% English. The observation focussed solely on the amount of time Reo Maori was used in each classroom observed and what percentage of the time was used for other language functions like speaking, listening, reading and writing. The narrative of the observation gives some description of the learning activities in the class at the time, and some comments on the classroom pedagogy and the environment.

Year Levels	Spoken	Listening	Writing	Reading	Total	Boys	Girls	Ethnicities
Years 1	95%	95%	0%	20%	11	6	5	Maori
Years 1 & 2	100%	100%	40%	5%	24	15	9	Maori
Years 2 & 3	100%	100%	0%	60%	19	11	8	Maori
Years 3 & 4	90%	90%	0%	40%				Maori
Years 5 & 6	95%	95%	40%	40%	12	8	4	Maori

Te Huringa o te Reo Rumaki started the morning with a full whanau hui to have karakia together, notices and affirmation were made including an announcement of successes of former students now at college. The children appeared to have gained great satisfaction in hearing ex-students doing well. I was also welcomed at this hui which was led by two senior students. The whole hui was conducted in reo Maori. The students were attentive and the tone very welcoming. The assembly ended with the singing and celebration of birthdays.

Te Huringa 1 (Years 1)

The Kaiako is fluent in the reo and all teacher initiated conversation were in the reo, and the student - student interactions were in reo Maori as well. Others students would remind those who spoke English and this was only once when I was in the room. A very colourful room with many words in reo Maori on the wall and students' work samples displayed around the room. There were some singing and reciting in the reo. The kaiako's tone was low and therefore the class tone was good. The powhiri practice just outside the room caused some interest. The boy skipping in the room did so speaking the reo.

There was teacher guided reading with two students at a time. There was also reading on the smart board. The smart board in the classroom was for learning the reo through music (singing).

Te Huringa 2 (Years 1 & 2)

The Kaiako is a fluent speaker and the interaction was in Maori. All teacher initiated conversations were in reo Maori. The roll call was in the reo and used to greet and affirm each child. There was a small performance of Kamate Haka as a way of settling the class. The interactions between students were in reo Maori, and those who used reo Pakeha were reminded to korero i te reo. The correct pronunciation of words and correct use of spoken reo is reflected in the way the Years 1 & 2 students use of the reo. The other kaiako is also very fluent and both had positive impact in the oral environment within which the students learn.

There Maori words starting with letters of the Maori alphabet displayed in the room. The children used reo while doing handwriting and the handwriting session was used for vocabulary in reo Maori. The children were at ease with the reliever who is an elderly 'matua' affectionately referred to as Matua Hemi who relieves regularly in Te Huringa. The only reading while I was there for 35 minutes was to correctly enunciate the words selected for hand writing.

Te Huringa 3 (Years 2 & 3)

The teacher is a fluent speaker and all the instructions and teacher initiated conversation was in reo Maori. The interactions between the students were in reo Maori and those speaking English were reminded to speak reo Maori. There were group work learning in vocabulary development in reo Maori, where students work on their own with one taking the lead. Students were using long sticks to read phrases on the high up on the wall as a reading aloud activity before working with the kaiako. This was done well with much group learning of past learning, and added to the quality of the oral environment in the class. There were a lot of reo heard in the class. The kaiako was working with a reading group on the mat. There was a lot of reo with actions when the teacher was working with the groups. There was much reminding of looking and listening to the words and sounds. The listening post was used as part of a follow up reading activity which further support the hearing of Maori in the room.

Two students were working on their word and sound associations in the Maori alphabet. The room was full of Maori words, and smart phonics with consonant-vowel combinations on the wall. This is a very colourful classroom. There was no sign of any print English resources in the room. The only English interaction in the room was between the teacher and me.

Te Huringa 4

This is an e-learning classroom with six laptops, 7 apple Ipads, 3 stand alone computers, a flat screen television and a listening post. The teacher is fluent and the minimal and those speaking in English were encouraged and supported to speak te reo Maori. This is a quieter classroom and a different oral learning environment. The room was soaked with Maori words with words starting with letters of Maori alphabet, and instructions in the use of computers in reo Maori. The only English texts in the room were the emergency procedures in the cloak bay. The whole room full of Maori words and the oral environment was largely in reo Maori.

The kaiako is fluent and all teacher interactions were in reo Maori. Those students working with her would have had 100% in Maori as students responded in reo Maori.

Te Huringa 7 Years 7 & 8

The students were unpacking and discussing an English text in reo Maori. This is a transition class and the students are to use English. And they were reading a group text in English and translate the actual text in reo Maori, and the students' responses suggests that they are able to switch from one language to the other. Translating English to reo Maori was challenge. There is a corner for display of students work in English which covers an estimated 4% of the classroom, and the print resources in English is an estimated 2% of all the print resources most of which are maths related texts. Children's work samples are predominantly in reo Maori. The room therefore is largely in reo Maori both orally and in print.

The complimentary circle was done in the reo and this was a good class affirmation exercise and the students did well in affirming others. It was also an opportunity to prompt and support others with their reo. The students were in good spirit. Though it was supposed to be a 50/50% split, the interactions both teacher-student and student-student interactions were largely in reo Maori. The background music while the students were working was in reo Maori. The auditory/oral environment for the reo is favourable for the acquisition of proficiency in reo Maori. The kaiako and kaiawhina are both fluent in the reo and this is facilitative in acquiring proficiency in reo Maori. The practice of reminding others to korero Maori, is still evident in the classroom despite being a transition classroom.

TRANSITION

Currently English is introduced at Year 6 but there are conversations about reviewing this with the thought of considering an earlier introduction at Year 5. This is based on the aim to successfully transition graduates of Te Huringa to English medium secondary education as most of the parents do not consider the local Maori immersion secondary school a favourable option. Most of the graduates of Te Huringa are enrolled general stream secondary schools where English is the language on instructions.

7.2

International Language School, 2255 Kuhio Avenue, Suite 1100, Honolulu.

School Director: LaNiece Dillon.

The school focuses predominantly on teaching English to students from different nationalities and enrolls students from across the globe. The current students population include students from Europe, the American continent and Asia namely Japanese. They cater for age levels from 16 years and over. A few of the students are working professionals in their own country

and are enrolled for a short period of time the shortest is for six weeks and for many a negotiated period depending on their needs and goals.

There are students using this course as a 'bridging strategy' to entering universities. This international school has branches in New Zealand and Australia, and has a standard course which has been developed, reviewed, redesigned for over forty years, and is based on Cambridge English programme. It is designed for students from non-English speakers and starting from basic English stair-cased to more complex and advanced English, with associated text and assessment tools. There are also well-designed on-line learning resources for each level of proficiency, developed over many years. This allows the students to learn individually, through listening to correct diction and pronunciation of the language and in correct context and associated grammar.

These on-line resources is an area where recognised international languages appear to enjoy the quality and quantity of resources available compared to minority languages. Maximising the use of English resources on-line is an area yet to be fully realised in New Zealand Education. The claim the Maori and Pacific students underperform in English in New Zealand Education through poor school pedagogy in acquiring proficiency in English for these students. The minimal resources for minority languages is also a challenge for Maori and Pacific languages, and an area worth investigating and investing in for the growth of Maori and Pacific languages in New Zealand.

7.3 University of Hawai'i, Manoa Road, Honolulu.

Faculty: Samoan Language

Director: Fepulea'i Lasei Dr John Mayer

This is a small faculty teaching Samoan to 300 students some of whom have Samoan ancestry and are born mainly outside of Samoa and American Samoa. Most of these students with Samoan ancestry are Hawai'ian born and some are of mixed ethnicities where one of the parents or grandparents is Samoan. There are also non-Samoans students learning Samoa. The claim the Spanish is the fastest growing language in the United States and Samoan as the fastest growing language in the NFL is phrase with some degree of truth.

Samoan Language is the largest Polynesian and Pacific language on offer at the University behind the Hawaiian language, and it is likely to be this way for the foreseeable future. The Samoan faculty at the time was offering some support for the Tongan and Maori language. The scarcity of on-line learning resources was surprising as it has been in existence for some years and the economic muscle that is the United States, one would think that there is an abundance of on-line resources. They rely mainly on some private recordings, commercial DVDs and other groups and their on-line resources to supplement their programme and resources.

The curriculum is mainly in hard copies and has been locally designed by the staff. There are print resources from different Samoan communities and personnel in other countries. A few of the resources were developed by those with competence in Samoan but little linguistic knowledge or discipline to guide the development and format of the resources printed. The

same can be said of some of the on-line resources where there are many language inaccuracies, and these are disincentives for the use of these on-line resources.

7.4 Adelaide Price Elementary School 1516 West North Street, Anaheim, Orange County, LA, USA

Principal: Mrs Suzy McMaster

This is an elementary school in Orange County within the Anaheim City School District. It has a roll of 910 students from Kindergarten (5 Year Olds) to Grade 7 (11 Year Olds). It is a multi-ethnic school with Latino children making up 75% of the roll. The other 25% are of Asian, Arabic, European and African American ancestry.

This is one of the few schools in the Anaheim School District which offer dual immersion in Spanish and English. The parents have to choose to enrol their children in the programme, with the district authority expectation that half of the children in the dual immersion programme are non-Spanish. This effectively means that half of the student population in the dual immersion programme are from ethnic groups other than Spanish or English.

The children in the dual immersion programme from K1 to Grade 4, are divided into two classes. One class does its learning in Spanish and the other in English for a week, and then swap teachers the following week where the learning will be in the other target language. The teacher who teaches in Spanish does that for both classes and likewise for the teacher who teaches in English. For half an hour a day, those who are not achieving at their age level grades are provided specialised support in their primary (first) language. Those achieving above are given extension work in their preferred language.

The teacher have to plan together to avoid any repetition, so that when they switch there is no repetition of work covered. Expectations of teacher are similar throughout the dual immersion programme, with the only difference being the language used. The emphasis especially for the younger age groups is speaking for most of the time throughout the week in the selected language. They cover the same curriculum contents, and continue on to the following week but in a different language. However for the teaching of the target language for that week, the emphasis may be different owing to the uniqueness of each language and the need to meet the diversity there is between students in the target language.

For students in K1 to Grade 4, they swap classrooms and teachers, while Grade 5 and 6 have the teacher for both languages. Teachers at Years 5 and 6 are proficient in both language and are expected to teach in both languages. These older age levels swap resources on Friday afternoon ready for the following week in the other language. They remain in the same room. There is the intention of starting having one teacher for each class and for both languages starting as early as Grade 3 in the near future.

There is an increased emphasis on the productive functions of language especially speaking. There was sufficient evidence on the classroom walls to suggest that there is also increased volume of writing in all the classrooms. It was also noted that teachers micro-teach both languages extensively. The structure, phonology, vocabulary and features specific to each language are taught in the class. The teachers follow a structured district programme, with the focus being on the child and their proficiency in the target languages.

Each class of the dual immersion programme has a teacher and an instructional language support staff, both paid for by the school district authority. The teachers and instructional language support staff working in the dual immersion programme are twin proficient in both English and Spanish. The availability of teachers, trained personnel and community people who are proficient in both Spanish and English is a huge contributing factor to the success of the programme. There are a lot of resources in both languages, with Spanish on-line resources having some errors that the teachers and students identified and modified.

I observed with interest the absence of time lapse when students interact in both languages, the animated nature of their interactions, the intonations, facial expressions from all students when they were having conversations among themselves. The affirming and excited response from the teachers and principal strongly indicate that the students, especially those in Grades 5 and 6 are very competent in both languages. How wonderful!

8.0 Commentary

Findlayson Park School in Manurewa South Auckland appear to have developed a great model of learning in two languages with good systems in place to manage the learning of students in two languages. The Ta'iala using Samoan for learning as well as teaching Samoan, operates on similar understanding of language learning understanding, as Te Huringa with the use of reo Maori for learning and teaching it. The shared understanding of teachers on immersion methodologies in both the Maori and Samoan unit were sound. The introduction of English was deliberate and gradual. In both Units the same teacher taught in two languages as well as teaching both languages during the introduction of English.

The 50/50 immersion of students at Price Elementary School in Los Angeles was an intriguing experience with the thinking, the split in location, time and teachers. The proficiency of students when they get to the higher age bracket was impressive. This was supported by adequate resourcing in personnel, learning materials, and on-line opportunities to learn both languages. The motivation to be proficient in both Spanish and English in the United States may not be the same as that of learning Maori and English, or Samoan and English in New Zealand. The 50/50 immersion model is well supported by resources, the community and is working for this particular school.

The use of two teachers at the lower grades at Price Elementary worked well. There were some issues around learning that forced them to revisit that practice. The effectiveness of the use of only one teacher for students in their last year at school gave them reasons to consider having one teacher from the beginning. The principal believed it was not going to be an easy decision as any change would mean reduction in resourcing from the local authority, and parents may not be supportive of any proposed changes.

The visit to the International School of Language in Hawaii and the Samoan Language Faculty at Manoa University highlight the disparity there is on the availability of resources for the teaching and learning of international languages to that of minority community languages. The resources available in the sites visited for the teaching of English and Spanish compared to Maori and Samoan are significant. Despite the fact that Maori and Samoan are two of the most spoken Polynesian languages internationally, the resources available for the learning of these languages on-line are grossly inadequate.

9.0 Conclusion

This study asserts that immersion methodologies are the most effective way of acquiring twin proficiency in languages. It recommends that the government through the Ministry of Education seriously considers immersion methodologies as critical component of a national strategy for the teaching and learning of languages in schools. There is the need for the Ministry of Education to initiate the teaching of English in a consistent manner to speakers of other languages, especially Maori and Pacific students. The development of teachers, resources and community awareness need to be considered as a critical part of developing children, proficient in their heritage language as well as English.

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