

Benefits of a Māori immersion programme at tertiary level

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Abstract: This paper discusses the benefits of a Māori immersion programme known as 'Te Reo Hāpai' that leads to a tertiary level Foundation Certificate. The programme was established in accordance with partnership principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and reflects culturally responsive teaching pedagogies consistent with Kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophies). Three students and their teacher write about experiences encountered while studying within Te Reo Hāpai showing their opportunities for engagement and transformation.

Keywords: Māori language; oppression; tertiary education; transformation

*Kotahi te kōhao o te ngira e kuhuna ai
te miro mā, te miro pango, me te miro whero*

There is only one eye to the needle through which
the white, red, and black threads must pass

The above proverb comes from Tāwhiao, the second Māori king. The three strands are interpreted here as avenues of learning that open the student up to the depth of Māoriness. In the university, one of these avenues is 'tino rangatiratanga' (sovereignty) and biculturalism, where the marae on campus is used as both a learning tool and a safe environment for teaching and learning. The second strand represents the Treaty of Waitangi which provides a foundation for bicultural existence and which helps develop a broader political and educational awareness for Māori. The third strand refers to Māori initiatives that contribute to cross-cultural development within Westernised institutions.

The symbolism of the three threads is also taken to represent the stories of the three student contributors to this paper. Despite their differences, the one commonality is that they all sought educational refuge within Te Reo Hāpai, a Maori immersion language programme at university, as a second-chance learning opportunity when their conventional schooling experiences had failed them.

Some educational needs

For those who wish to engage in Kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophy) based teaching, there is a need to understand the concerns that Māori hold, and the earlier challenges that required them at times to trade their indigenous identity in pursuit of a Westernised education. However, as Freire states, "the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice" means they will fight "to recover their lost humanity" (1972, p. 20). Although Māori had to trade much for recognition in assimilation, it did not weaken the resolve of Māori to progress.

Despite the space that has been reclaimed by Māori, there is still a lot to be done. Secondary school students in Aotearoa / New Zealand, generally leave school with minimal educational qualifications.

While most ... young people are achieving at levels comparable to the best in the world, more of our 14–18-year olds have disengaged from the education system than in many other comparable countries. A disproportionately large number of these are Māori youth...Nationally, 45 percent of Māori students left school without reaching a level 1 qualification in 2006. The percentage in some regions is higher.
(Ministry of Education, 2008, p.23)

Without success in education all sorts of social disparities for Māori will continue. Foundation Certificate programmes offer one way to advance. They enable entry into a learning experience more befitting of adults. Within the current educational climate of Aotearoa / New Zealand it is one of the few ways that adult Māori learners can regain entry into a qualification pathway. The vehicle used for this re-entry to education is the Māori language. Students embark upon an educational pathway while navigating the Māori language, and the spiritual aspects of Māori culture. Students are encouraged to seek a higher understanding of who they and where they come from through the processes of whakapapa (genealogy), whakawhanaungatanga (connected relationships), and tuakana/teina (generational relationships). The utilisation of such relationships helps the student to cement a strong foundation to build their identity and motivation.

Opportunities to gain language and culture use are provided to students while studying within Te Reo Hāpai. One such opportunity involves delivering the compulsory Māori component of a medical degree at the University of Auckland. The delivery of this component involves working with diverse groups of national and international learners. The medical degree accommodates an intake of around 330 students each year from all over the world. Te Reo Hāpai engages in transformative praxis by sharing what it means to be Māori with the medical students (the vast majority of each intake are non-Māori). This presents its own set of cultural challenges and conflicts, which may not seem beneficial initially, but ultimately facilitates resilience and pride. Many have not encountered such a culturally challenging experience, but through the task of dealing with the difference of others, they come to value their own culture more. They engage in fierce reflection, and often emerge from this experience as rejuvenated individuals. While some may feel that they have to avenge all wrong-doings to Māori, others realise that knowing, respecting and valuing who students are, where they come from and building on what they bring with them must be valued and that “Māori students, whānau, hapu, iwi and educators [should be encouraged to] share knowledge and expertise with each other to produce better mutual outcomes.” (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 20).

Other ethnic groups who have studied as part of Te Reo Hāpai have seen the value in identifying with tangata whenua (indigenous people). The education ventured by the following three graduates of Te Reo Hāpai suggests that tangata whenua of Aotearoa are liberated when connecting with their identity in a positive cultural way. Through this identity journey, being Māori is promoted and owned, leading to positive educational outcomes.

Vanhou Lolesio's story

"I am achieving."
E toe oso fo'i le la taeao
(Regardless of any failings today, the sun will shine tomorrow)

I applied for the English-medium Foundation Certificate programme at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. However due to the restriction on student numbers, I was eliminated. As a result I turned to the Māori Medium Foundation Certificate programme (Te Reo Hāpai) as this was my only other pathway to gaining entry into the Bachelor of Education (Teaching). I was initially apprehensive but I felt that I had little choice but to accept this challenge.

I am a New Zealand-born Samoan and was brought up the fa'asamoa way (traditional Samoan way of life). During my formative years in education I was confronted with two completely different cultural realities. With strong family support I was able to negotiate the trials and tribulations of schooling under Westernised educational pedagogies and in contrast I was required to balance this with a strict upbringing under Samoan teachings, through our way of life, and through the teachings of church. Freire's (1972) theorising holds that education always involves inter-cultural social relations and political choice.

Upon entry to Te Reo Hāpai I was shocked to realize that this course was conducted totally in the Māori language. It provoked inadequacies on my part, and left me questioning whether I would be able to fully engage in this course, and emerge successfully at the end. Considering that I was one of two 'other' ethnic groups (Samoan and Pākehā) in this Māori-medium class boosted my resolve to continue.

The diversity of the class enabled all students to align our cultural habitus with Māori. I found similarities between my first language, the Samoan language, and te reo Māori (the Māori language). This encouraged me to participate fully in the diverse range of course content presented to our class. My initial progression was hindered at times because of my limited ability to converse with my fellow classmates. I was not able to see initially that by taking risks with language I was developing my inter-language competence. My vocabulary and grammatical knowledge of Māori language began to grow, and so too did my educational confidence.

Social relationships in class provoked stimulating debates on factors that impacted upon the Māori language, the Māori people and their identity. As the year progressed we were totally submerged in a culture that provided an insight into the ways of the Māori people. We gained insight from Freire (1972) who argues that education is based on relations of oppression and that through learning about the social and economic inequalities that impacted greatly on the Māori culture, their land and their identity, we were becoming more conscious of the ways of the oppressor.

As a tertiary student of Samoan descent it was humbling for me to encounter the struggles of the indigenous people of New Zealand. I am equally humbled by the pursuit of Māori to correct the wrongs perpetuated through a colonised culture. I initially had a fragmented perception of Māori, and their constant protesting for equal opportunity, however as an 'insider' I experienced first hand the despair of the Māori in my class who have had to endure the hegemony of New Zealand society. This insight has made me more determined to continue to walk the Māori-medium pathway, regardless of the Westernised paradigms espoused by the academy.

My time in Te Reo Hāpai was extremely fruitful. I am now in the second year of a Bachelor of Education degree specialising in the Māori medium. This degree will enable me to teach either in an English-medium primary school, a Māori-medium or bilingual primary school, a Samoan-medium or bilingual class, or I could teach the Māori language at a secondary school. I plan to maintain my three languages in the future, as I speak Samoan at home, I speak Māori at school, and I speak English in my work environment.

My dreams and aspirations for the future are to further my education in all three languages; to attain a higher educational degree that can be used to support future generations of Māori and Samoan people. Through this I hope to provide equal opportunities to those who are currently not being reflected as equal, hoping that they too will seek the same opportunities that I did, to further their education, and take hold of the diverse world of education. Freire has exposed the fundamental wrongs through his theory and clearly identifies pathways to a stronger future for indigenous peoples of the world. I would like to consider myself an advocate for those pathways of education for indigenous people.

Dawn Piper's story

"I needed to achieve."

Tungia te ururoa kia tipu te whakaritorito te tipu a te harakeke

(Clear away the under growth to let the new shoot find its pathway into the world)

The journey that I have taken began before my conception. The creator had a plan for me that would see fruition occur in my life's entirety. It stems from a long line of whakapapa (genealogy) that includes a people who were hunters and gatherers. Whilst the nature of hunting and gathering has changed from searching for basic human needs in order to survive, to acquiring knowledge in order to survive, the premise remains the same. Like my tūpuna (ancestors) survival is the key.

The line that draws me closer to survival in this modern world has been my involvement in the Foundation Certificate programme of Te Reo Hāpai, delivered through the medium of te reo Māori (Māori language). Whilst the course was 'only' a certificate programme for some, it has been a life-line for others, a life-line that has provided insight into a culture and language that through whakapapa (genealogy) is mine. But the process of colonisation and urban migration was my home and teacher in my younger years.

Te Reo Hāpai means to lift up the language, and it provides for students an undergraduate programme that links the Māori world to teacher education. Moreover, it provides a platform for what Freire (1972) describes as transformative praxis to occur. Transformative praxis is learning and thinking about one's oppression and planning to bring about change. To understand how transformative praxis has occurred in my journey it is important to highlight some historical factors that had impacted on my life.

Having been raised in a predominately Pākehā environment, living as a Māori person was far from my mind. The youngest of 8 siblings, I was the only child to be born on tūpuna (ancestral) land, which I feel can account for the yearning I had to know my indigenous self, although unlike my tūpuna who lived on that land in a communal rural setting, my family raised me in an urban area and my formative years were guided by Pākehā ideology. Furthermore the contact with my indigenous language was non-existent within the family setting. It was not until I reached state primary school that I was introduced to small bite-sized portions of 'te ao Māori' (Māori world). Yet these small portions would entice me through my period in the state education system.

Entering into marriage and motherhood, where I was sitting in a Māori world but not understanding that world, would be a point in life for which I would question my self identity. Then losing an adult child would also be a point in my life for which I would question my self-worth. Consequently it was having the opportunity to learn my indigenous language and realising that my indigenesness did matter, that helped rebuild my self-confidence that has led me on this

pathway to be able to transfer my knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga (the Māori language and its guiding principles) to others.

The strategies which were used in the transformative praxis that occurred in the Foundation programme included kotahitanga (working collaboratively), tuakana/teina (scaffolding from a learned other), practical experiences and Kaupapa Māori theory. In the Foundation programme my knowledge was fully legitimate and valued, which enabled me to gain skills to be able to re-appropriate the dominant knowledge for my own emancipation. Self-awareness and understanding of the Māori worldview caused reflection of self to strengthen my indigenous identity. An example would be when upon entering the class I had beliefs in a religion and did not know whether or not I would have to compromise those beliefs to be able to learn my indigenous language. As I came to understand more of Māori epistemology I was to find that the Māori world is based on spirituality rather than religion, and one could freely learn about one's own indigenesness. Furthermore, to be restorers of humanity ourselves we need to have the ability to be able to stand in both worlds.

Within the delivery of Te Reo Hāpai I engaged in communal learning to share and learn together with my fellow students and employ a strategy of working in a collaborative way. The notion behind this communal style of learning was based on understanding of kotahitanga (working as one). By working together as one we engaged in the tuakana/teina (sibling, elder/younger) method, whereby a more knowledgeable person the tuakana, would scaffold another person the teina. Being a mature student myself there were many times that I did scaffold younger students utilising the knowledge and life skills I had acquired, which was reciprocated also by the younger students as they had the knowledge of modern technology to share. There were numerous opportunities given to work collaboratively to achieve goals and complete assignments with the onus always on myself to take the opportunity or not.

There were no handouts to entice me into the programme; the driving force was the desire to regain my own indigenous identity. Through Kaupapa Māori teachings which include the learning of whakatauki (proverbs), pūrakau and pakiwaitara (myths, legends) waiata, mōteatea, pātere (songs, laments), karanga (calling to visitors) and mihi (greetings), I was able to learn the depth of my indigenous language as the foundation programme gave me an opportunity to live what I was learning and as te reo Māori is a living evolving language I know this will be an ongoing learning process for my life's entirety.

I am currently teaching te reo Māori to all the students in one mainstream primary school where 85% are Māori children and I am a relieving teacher in bilingual units at other schools. Having been through Te Reo Hāpai my practice uses a teaching philosophy that all children need to be proud of who they are, but can be taught our indigenous language of Aotearoa through practicing Kaupapa Māori no matter who they are or where they come from.

Simon Pomare's story

"I have achieved."

He ao te rangi ka uhia, he huruhuru o te manu, ka rere

(As clouds adorn the sky so to do feathers enable a bird to fly)

By joining together we will succeed. As I stepped into the Te Reo Hāpai classroom in 2002 I never imagined the journey of self-discovery that would unfurl. There were various challenges and some self-doubt during this year-long course, but I was continuously guided and encouraged

to succeed by my lecturer as a part of this new Te Reo Hāpai whānau (family). The spiritual seed that was planted within us and nurtured by our lecturer empowered us all to succeed in all endeavours of life. The encouragement came from such sayings as: there is no mountain that cannot be climbed, no river that cannot be crossed; you must believe in yourself. Those words and lessons learned stay firmly fixed in my mind to this day. As students, we came from different backgrounds and ranged in age from teenagers to mature adults. The struggles of each person were overcome by the dedication of others committed to a kaupapa (cause) that once begun is a never-ending discovery of learning, looking beyond the challenges of a society that sees tokenism as one of the official languages of Aotearoa.

Awakened by the desire to learn the most simple of things like: who am I? and what is it like to be able to speak and understand the Māori language, my language? I have already been touched and have touched many lives and spirits in the awakening of my Māoritanga (Māoriness) through the learning of my language. Te Reo Hāpai was a stepping stone toward my new-found career. At the conclusion of Te Reo Hāpai, I entered into the Bachelor of Education (Māori-medium teaching) degree. This pathway has enabled me to teach in a Kaupapa Māori environment.

Before my humble beginnings in Te Reo Hāpai I was unaware of the disparity and the challenges that Kura Kaupapa Māori schools, staff and whanau endured to return the treasures of their forefathers to a country whose indigenous people have been struggling since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi to bring about equitable change. Through my time in Te Reo Hāpai I was given the strength, mentally, physically and spiritually, to withstand the rigours of hard work, to support and re-institutionalise the place of Māori within the Westernised state and school system.

During my time studying at Te Puna Wānanga, the Māori Education department of the Faculty of Education at the University of Auckland, I was able to visit different types of schools and get an insight into how the curriculum is delivered. I chose one Kura Kaupapa, and some bilingual units, as well as mainstream schools for my practicum teaching. I was able to see how the Kura Kaupapa struggled with having enough Māori resources to educate children in the Māori language. To compete with mainstream school resources seemed impossible. However, the passion and dedication of the teachers within Kura Kaupapa Māori under the umbrella of Te Aho Matua (Māori educational philosophy and its principles) is truly a valuable asset to the Māori communities both rural and urban. Guided by the principles of Te Aho Matua, we are able to teach our students a rich history as seen through the eyes of Māori, and where students are immersed in Māori tradition and te reo Māori. It is here we see the emancipation of our people by the use of our language as the tool to fight oppression. We can use Freire's thinking to make the indigenous peoples' future their own, not to merely exist in the world where oppression of Māori continues to be a reality: "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world." (Freire, 1970, p. 69).

By continuing to fight for the indigenous language of the Māori and strengthen what we already know, we are providing the catalyst for the next generation of Māori to be in control of their world. To empower Māori to survive and nurture the Māori culture is to become more human. I am honoured to be teaching at Te Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori Medium) o Te Rakipae Whenua located on the North Shore of Auckland, New Zealand. This is a school enriched with tikanga Māori (tradition) focusing on the language of our tūpuna (ancestors), delivering a curriculum to produce graduates who are achievers, graduates who are proud to be Māori, graduates who are leaders in a changing society, graduates who are risk takers, who use their mistakes as their learning and teaching tool and not as their failure. These graduates become contributors and producers in their society and on a global scale, while co-existing in a society where the

indigenous people are the minority. A strategy we use as a staff is to collectively participate in professional development to enhance our skills to produce these graduates. By entering into a Kura Kaupapa Māori environment guided by the principles of Te Aho Matua, staff work as one with the whānau (family) of our students, to provide a curriculum that is focused on te reo Māori language.

In my journey of learning thus far, I continue to study new aspects of teaching in a Kaupapa Māori environment. I retain the knowledge and nurture the seed of spirituality that was awakened within me in Te Reo Hāpai back in 2002. I exist in a world where as an educator of future Māori generations I can facilitate and use the education system to bring about change, and through this process inspire other generations to stand tall and be Māori, to make the world theirs.

Conclusion

Te Reo Hāpai imparts to students the benefits of opportunity, identity and relationships. Underpinned by a Māori philosophy that binds us to our ancestral lands, our human struggles, our spiritual beliefs and our tino rangatiratanga (our own sovereignty) as indigenous peoples of Aotearoa (New Zealand), Te Reo Hāpai encourages students to seek a tertiary education within a culturally-located and culturally-responsive educational environment.

King Tawhiao knew that to enhance the well-being of his people, he needed to give them voice, and allow them to express their desires and fears. The same power of voice was given to these students through Te Reo Hāpai. A voice once silenced takes the being into another realm called tacit consensus – where, by their own silence, they are consenting to whatever is placed before them. This is the power of the oppressor on the oppressed. These students were given the power to step beyond the barriers of oppression and have proven that with support and encouragement they were able to make positive decisions for their future. They have shown how their determination allowed them to achieve and improve their own self-worth, albeit unconsciously. They are now looking to the future with optimism, awaiting the positive outcomes to be gained by Māori.

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Author Notes

Te Rongopai Morehu (Ngāti Whātua) is the programme co-ordinator for Te Reo Hāpai, a tertiary-level programme that prepares students for the Bachelor of Education (Māori Medium Teaching) degree at the University of Auckland. Vanhou Lolesio is a Samoan student in Year 2 of that programme while Dawn Piper (Ngāti Whātua) and Simon Pomare (Ngāti Kahungunu) are graduates who are now teaching.

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