PROMOTING MĀORI LANGUAGE
THROUGH READING AND INTERACTIVE TASKS
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INTRODUCTION
The foreword to the 1990 Māori Language Syllabus, Tīke Māori Ora, emphasises the
"contribution made by Māori language and culture to New Zealand’s national life" and
the responsibilities of all primary school
teachers to include "appropriate Māori
language and culture in all studies across the
curriculum".

Many teachers find such a responsibility
both exciting and frightening. It is exciting
to be able to pass on to children the
indigenous language of their country. It is
also exciting to play a role in the survival of
the language itself.

The responsibility is frightening, however,
because most of today’s teachers are
themselves products of one of the most
monolingual societies in the world. Many
feel self-conscious about speaking Māori in
any context, let alone in a classroom full of
children, some of whom may well speak
Māori better than they do. Others fear that
as non-native speakers they will serve as
imperfect models for the children, or that
the small amount of Māori they can manage
will be seen as totonism.

These and other fears often lead teachers to
rationalise that it is better to leave the
teaching of Māori to native speakers. The
sad reality, however, is that native Māori-
speaking teachers are still in short supply and
while teachers with a little knowledge of
Māori wait for enough experts to come
forward more and more children miss the
chance to learn the indigenous language
that is New Zealand’s national heritage.

Bilingualism in a heritage language
Research suggests that properly managed
bilingualism leads to advantages which
include greater cognitive flexibility, enhanced
creativity, and increased
intellectual development. Greater benefits
still result, both to individuals and to society, when children learn a heritage
language alongside the dominant language
of the community, since knowledge of a
heritage language plays a significant part in
the development of cultural identity.

A Māori proverb quoted in a submission to
the Waitangi Tribunal in 1986 highlights

...native Māori-speaking
teachers are still in short
supply and while
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knowledge of Maori wait
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come forward more and
more children miss the
chance to learn the
indigenous language
that is New Zealand’s
national heritage.

Given the issue of limited teacher
proficiency, it was necessary to find a means
of providing quality comprehensible input
and tasks which could be carried out
relatively independently by the participating
children. Dickie’s enthusiasm for and
expertise in the use of reading cards for
teaching English as a Second Language
motivated me to develop and trial Māori
language reading cards in a local primary
school.

Advantages of paired reading
The contribution reading makes to
language learning is well recognised. It
introduces readers to a vast pool of
vocabulary as well as to language structures
not encountered in spoken language. Paired
reading followed by well-crafted
communicative tasks builds on these
advantages by offering opportunities for
asking and answering questions, eliciting
help, negotiating meaning, and repetition of
vocabulary and grammatical structures, all
in a very natural and non-threatening way.
It encourages skimming, scanning, and
reading of text as well as deeper processing
of content as pairs of children work co-
operatively to complete set tasks.

Small-group work and second language
learning
Small-group work (including pair work)
draws together the semantic decoding
processes involved in comprehension of
input and the syntactic processes which are
essential for output. In other words, small-
group work gives learners control of a
language-learning situation which offers
rich opportunities for negotiation of both
input and output. It allows learners to try
out new language forms and refine their
output as discussion continues. A further
advantage is that a small, usually supportive,
group of peers provides a less stressful
environment for a child’s faltering attempts
at second language production than a
whole-class situation with the teacher
presiding. The smaller the group, of course,
the more turns each learner gets, so pair
work also offers maximum interaction.
METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The children

A group of Māori-speaking children aged 11 and 12 years who attended an inner-city school became the participants of the study. Some had attended Kohanga Reo in their early years. All had been in a bilingual class or Māori immersion class for periods ranging from two to six years, but the school’s bilingual unit catered only for junior and middle school children and there was no provision for Māori language support for children in senior classes. All the participating children had been, for at least six months, in an English-medium class.

The children’s teacher had very little knowledge of Māori and was concerned about her inability to meet their Māori language needs. She welcomed the opportunity for them to take part in the research. The children themselves were enthusiastic about any work that would help them advance their Māori language skills. Preliminary informal assessment showed that although their proficiency in Māori was limited, all six were capable of introducing themselves in Māori and of reading and understanding a simple written text.

Duration and organisation of the study

Oral pre-tests were administered at the commencement of the study. The children then began working on the selected texts and specially developed reading cards. This work took place over an unbroken six-week period, during which time the children were given a new text and reading card each week. They spent one 45-minute session each week working in pairs with the text and reading card and two 20-minute sessions later in the week working on associated individual tasks, bringing the total time for the intervention to eight hours and 30 minutes.

The interactive sessions were recorded on audiotape and later transcribed. Following the six-week intervention the children were retested and results of the pre-tests and post-tests compared.

In order to avoid providing Māori language input which would invalidate the research, I spoke only English to the children after the initial interview. Only one of the children had any Māori language input in the home during the period of the research and this was only for the first three days, while his grandmother was visiting.

Content of reading cards

Each reading card began with a pre-reading task, the purpose of which was to:

- stimulate interest in the topic;
- activate prior knowledge;
- encourage recall of related vocabulary; and
- generate discussion.

Pre-reading tasks included:

- sharing personal information relevant to the text;
- finding key places on a map;
- setting questions that the text might answer; and
- discussing pictures relevant to the text.

The first two reading cards instructed the children to read the text aloud together to encourage them to support and assist each other if necessary. The remaining four cards left the children to make their own decisions about whether to read silently or aloud together.

Oral post-reading tasks followed the reading. The objectives of these tasks were to:

- give children practice in speaking Māori while offering supporting vocabulary and structures;
- provide repetition through re-reading and discussion of the text;
- encourage skimming and scanning of the text for specific information;
- encourage deeper processing of content;
- provide practice in asking and answering questions; and
- give children confidence in using Māori in a range of different situations and roles.

Post-reading tasks included:

- true/false statements;
- question and answer;
- role plays; and
- finding and using specific information.

Finally there was a written or practical task, the objectives of which were to:

- provide repetition through re-reading of text;
- encourage application of new knowledge;
- encourage deeper processing of content;
- encourage closer attention to grammatical structures;
- provide opportunities for speaking Māori in a less structured situation; and
- give practice in writing Māori.

Practical and written tasks included:

- drawing, labelling, and describing a picture;
- making a poster; and
- following instructions to make an item.

The reading cards were attractively presented on brightly coloured card to give them similar status to equivalent commercially-produced English language materials. See figures 1 and 2 for sample reading cards and figure 3 for the English language summary.

Language of instructions

There were both pedagogical and political reasons for wanting to write all instructions in Māori. However, the nature of the tasks meant that the level of Māori language required to write adequate instructions was well beyond the difficulty level of the texts themselves. Given that the children would be working independently of a teacher it was necessary to write some of the instructions in English.

The children’s interactions

The participating children showed themselves to be fully capable of using the texts and reading cards independently of the teacher. While not all interaction took place through the medium of Māori, the children made a conscientious effort to speak as much Māori as possible, particularly while engaged in the post-reading interactive tasks. They supported each other by listening attentively, by giving encouraging feedback, by modelling, supplying vocabulary or word meanings for each other and sometimes by overt correction of errors. They also used Māori, albeit briefly, for a range of different language functions above and beyond the requirements of the set tasks. This was particularly satisfying, given that the class teacher had reported never having heard any of them use Māori inside or outside the classroom prior to the commencement of the study.

When working on the interactive oral tasks the children frequently referred back to the written texts to draw on both content and vocabulary. They also took advantage of the syntactic models.
Before you read the story, discuss these questions with your partner.

1. Look at the picture on page 9. Look carefully at the boys’ faces. What do you think is going to happen?
2. Think of a time when another child has tried to get you to do something wrong. Tell your partner about it, and listen to what your partner has to say.

Now read the story Te Haere ki te Hoko Rohi. If you find anything hard to understand, talk to your partner about it. Kōrero Māori.

A.

Nei mai kōrero māhi:

Ae / kāo / whakaririra

There are four sentences written below. Your partner has four different sentences. Take turns with your partner to read your sentences to each other. One person reads the sentence. The other person says “ae” if the sentence is right or “kāo” if it is wrong. If it’s wrong, make it right.

E.g.  
I haere a Pāpā ki te toa.
Kāo. I haere a Himiona ki te toa.

You have No. 1, so you start.

1. I te timatanga o te gukapuna, i rito a Himiona i tana moenga.
2. Nā Pereniko i hoato te rua tāra ki a Himiona.
3. I haere a Himiona ki te toa ki te hoko panana.
4. I te timo pirangi a Himiona ki te haere ki te toa.

Hutaraha a kāri

B.

Now do this “Mea ake!” exercise with your partner. The first person says a letter and a number. The other person follows the instructions in that box. E.g. If your partner says A3, then you pretend to be Himiona and tell your parents why you haven’t bought any bread. Then it’s your turn to say a letter and number for your partner. Keep on going until you have done all the boxes. Kōrero Māori.

Mea ake!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ko Pereniko koe.</td>
<td>Ko Himiona koe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ka tae mai a Himiona ki te toa, he aha tō kōrero ki a ia?</td>
<td>Kei te pirangi koe ki te tīnī te rua tāra. He aha tō kōrero ki te kaihau toa?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He aha tō kōrero ki a Māmā i te wā e tatari ana kōrua i a Himiona?</td>
<td>Kua hoki mai a Himiona ki te kainga, kōrero he rohi. He aha tō kōrero ki a ia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ko Himiona koe.</td>
<td>Ko Pereniko koe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ka hoki koe ki te kainga, he aha tō kōrero ki a mātua?</td>
<td>Kia kete ao koe i a Himiona, he aha tō kōrero ki a ia?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C.

Draw a map of the area where Himiona and Pereniko live. The story gives you some information about where the places are. You can make up the other ideas yourself.

1. Show these places on the map. Label them in Māori.
   - Himiona’s house
   - The hot bread shop
   - Pereniko’s house
   - The dairy with the new spacey machines
   - The school the boys go to.

2. Draw a line of arrows showing the route Himiona took to get to the shop and home again.

3. Write a sentence in Māori to say what your map is about.

Kua oti tō mahi i nainanei. Kia ora.
Before you read the story, discuss these questions with your partner.

1. Look at the picture on page 9. Look carefully at the boys’ faces. What do you think is going to happen?
2. Think of a time when another child has tried to get you to do something wrong. Talk to your partner about it. Kōrero Māori if you can.

Read the story silently. If you find anything hard to understand, talk to your partner about it. Kōrero Māori.

Matihia ē nei mahi: A

Ae/iao/whakotikata
Take turns with your partner to read your sentences to each other. One person reads the sentence. The other person says “æ” if the sentence is right or “kāo” if it is wrong. If it’s wrong, make it right.

Eg. I haere a Pāpā ki te tūa
Kāo. I haere a Himiona ki te tūa.

Your partner will start. Kōrero Māori.

2. I haere a Himiona ki te tūa mā runga i te metoka.
4. Nā Perehiko i Karanga mai “Haranui ki te tūro kī te mihinī iōa.”
6. I ora stu te tūa ngā tēma e rau.
8. He mihinī ātea kātoto i te tūa pātara.

Hunihia te kai:

FIGURE 2: SAMPLE READING CARD (CARD B)

B.
Now do this “Mea ake!” exercise with your partner. The first person says a letter and a number. The other person follows the instructions in that box. Eg: if your partner says A3, you pretend to be Himiona and tell your parents why you haven’t bought any bread. Then it’s your turn to say a letter and number for your partner. Keep on going until you have done all the boxes. Kōrero Māori.

Mea ake!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He aha tō kōrero ki te tūa. He aha tō kōrero ki te tūra.</td>
<td>He aha tō kōrero ki te tūra. He aha tō kōrero ki te tūa.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C.
Draw a map of the area where Himiona and Perehiko live. The story gives you some information about where the places are. You can make up the other ideas yourself.

1. Show these places on the map. Label them in Māori.
   - Himiona’s house
   - The hot bread shop
   - Perehiko’s house
   - The dairy with the new spacey machines
   - The school the boys go to

2. Draw a line of arrows showing the route Himiona took to get to the shop and home again.

3. Write a sentence in Māori to say what your map is about.

Kua oti tō mahi i naianei, Kia ora.