SUPPORTING TEACHERS TO INCREASE THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF STUDENT TARGET LANGUAGE USE: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE ‘TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN LANGUAGES’ (TPDL) PROGRAMME

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the efficacy of a programme of teacher professional development in Languages (TPDL) in increasing the quality and quantity of student use of a language. Data from the TPDL (2007) cohort show that by working within a sound research-based pedagogical framework and engaging in personalised professional reflection on evidence collected from their classrooms, teachers can achieve significant improvement in the quality and quantity of the target language by students in a year-long language learning programme. This improvement in meaningful and pragmatic student use of the language can occur regardless of the level of language skills of the teacher.

INTRODUCTION

“I understand now that the target language should be used as much as possible in the classroom to communicate, explain, and practise – not just in relationship to ‘what is being taught’.” (language learner and teacher)

“Children know more than I’ve given them credit for, so it gives me confidence to push them further.” (language learner and teacher)

“My focus has broadened to include interactive language tasks wherever possible in my planning and to be constantly aware of opportunities for ‘comprehensible input plus 1’.” (competent language user and teacher)

“After 5 weeks, the students held an ‘Ultimate Challenge’ session to see just how long they could go speaking only German. All students took part. I took close note of a target group but all the children monitored themselves and the others in their group. For 35 minutes no English was heard. We stopped because it was time to go home”. (language learner and teacher)

“The evidence [from the second of four TPDL classroom observations] showed pleasing improvement in students’ interactions, communication and especially output. The number of speech acts was three to five times higher in Visit 2 than in Visit 1. Students used around five times more sentences when they talked.” (native speaker and teacher)

“I am less intrusive as a teacher and ‘freed up’ to maximize focused input for individual students and to observe the progress of all of my students”. (native speaker and teacher)

These teachers were referring to changes in practice and understandings gained as a result of participation in the Ministry of Education funded Teacher Professional Development in Languages (TPDL) for teachers of languages in Years 7 and 8. They ranged from teachers who were competent users of the target language (TL) to teachers who were teaching an additional language at the same time as they were learning it. The TPDL is a year-long professional development programme which comprises three interrelated components: language study, second language acquisition (SLA) pedagogy and in-school support. It aims to increase teacher and student use of the TL.

BACKGROUND

In 2005, a pilot TPDL Programme began in Northland and Auckland for teachers of languages Years 7-8. Its intended outcomes were to develop teacher language proficiency and second language teaching capabilities in order to improve student language learning outcomes. As of 2008, the full TPDL Programme caters nationally for teachers of Years 7-10 Chinese, French, German, Japanese and Spanish. Its intended outcomes are the same. This paper reports on data from the TPDL 2007 cohort. Amongst the 30 teachers in the TPDL 2007 there was a range of prior language knowledge including: native speakers, teachers who could speak the language quite well, teachers who had some prior study of the language but lacked confidence, and several teachers who were complete beginners in the language and in language teaching. This broad range of prior knowledge is attributable to the fact that in New Zealand there has been almost no pre-service (primary) provision for language teaching and no separate curriculum area for learning languages.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TPDL MODEL

The TPDL model encourages and enables teachers to use the target language (TL) in their classrooms (even if they themselves are learners of the language) and to provide ways for their students to use the TL in ever more sophisticated and quantitative ways.

The TPDL model (Fig. 1 overleaf) comprises three interrelated foci:

1. Language proficiency improvement: increasing teachers’ TL competence and supporting teachers to gain qualifications in that language (ideally, internationally recognised qualifications). Teachers are supported in placement in courses appropriate to their level. In addition, four language group meetings are held per language, to discuss and practise language learning strategies in TL.
2. SLA Pedagogy: deepening teachers’ understanding of SLA pedagogy, through requiring all participating teachers to complete a university graduate-level course “Teaching Languages in Schools” (EDPROFST 360, The University of Auckland). This involves 40 hours of face-to-face tuition held in four two-day blocks over the year.

3. In-School Support: supporting teachers to achieve the programme outcomes, with a focus on increased student use of the target language.

![Conceptual model of the TPDL](https://example.com/tpdl-model.png)

While teachers gain recognised qualifications in the language proficiency and the SLA pedagogy components, it is in the classroom that the teachers demonstrate these gains. Hence the evidence presented in this paper is collected from the In-School Support component of TPDL.

**THE IN-SCHOOL SUPPORT COMPONENT**

The In-School Support component consists of four school observation visits (one per term) with scaffolded foci and expectations. At each visit a language lesson is observed and data, in the form of verbatim transcripts, are collected and discussed with the teacher. In Visit 1, which occurs before any other aspects of the programme have begun, baseline data of teacher and student use of the TL are collected. Each teacher is introduced to the theoretical framework of the TPDL programme and provided with copies of the literature review of SLA pedagogy (Ellis, 2005) containing ten principles of instructed SLA. All teachers come together for an introductory meeting after the baseline data have been collected. At this meeting, teachers workshop the ten principles and are introduced to the data collection tools and methods developed by the project directors: Evidence of Principles and Strategies form (Appendix 1), the Progress Standards (Appendix 2) and the focus for each observation (Figure 2).

**A THEORETICAL RATIONALE FOR THE TPDL PROGRAMME**

**The pedagogical model**

The Ministry of Education-commissioned review of second language acquisition literature and best evidence synthesis for teaching additional languages (Ellis, 2005), presented ten principles of effective instructed second language acquisition. These principles provide the theoretical underpinning of the TPDL and serve not only as a guide to effective language learning and teaching but also as a basis for evaluating the outcomes in the In-School Support component. The review showed that effective languages teachers provide multiple opportunities for their students to use the target language appropriately in meaningful communicative contexts. Therefore, the In-School Support component of the TPDL highlights the principles:

- Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions
- Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning.
- Instruction also needs to focus on form
- Successful instruction requires extensive target-language input.
- Successful instruction requires opportunities for output
- The opportunity to interact in the target language is central to developing proficiency.

The TPDL encourages the use of formulaic expressions by the teacher (as one type of input) and by the students (as output for pragmatic purposes) in tandem with adopting task-based learning pedagogy (TBL) so that language is used in meaningful contexts. Form is focussed on in the context of the language required to complete tasks.

**Formulaic expressions**

Formulaic expressions are ‘chunks’ of functional language. Some examples from English are: “Could you repeat that, please?”, “I’m sorry”, “Don’t mention it!”, “What does this mean?”. A rich repertoire of TL formulaic expressions allows students to use real language in meaningful exchanges (at phrase or sentence level) and introduces them to language patterns which may also serve as a basis for the later development of a rule-based competence. Ellis (1996) has suggested that learners first internalise formulaic expressions and then, at a later stage, analyse them. The importance of formulaic expressions in language use has been well documented in recent times. Foster (2001)
estimated that over 40% of native speaker language consists of formulaic expressions.

Teachers in the TPDL are expected to use formulaic expressions in the TL with the class for classroom management, social goals and instructional goals. In addition, frequently used expressions in English are underlined in the verbatim transcripts and teachers and students are expected to have access to all the expressions and encouraged to learn them for use in class work.

Opportunities for interaction provided through meaningful interactive tasks (TBL)

A second focus of the programme is to enable teachers to provide students with opportunities to produce language (output) through interactive tasks. Output in this sense does not mean imitating or manipulating pre-determined words or phrases; it means allowing the students to use language to create meaning and to communicate with each other. Ellis (2003) defines a task as “a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end it requires learners to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of a task may pre-dispose them to choose particular forms.” Like other language activities, a task can encourage productive or receptive, and oral or written skills, and various cognitive processes” (p. 16). Teachers practise and analyse interactive tasks in the pedagogy classes and are encouraged to develop similar tasks to suit their own teaching contexts.

The Professional Development Model

The TPDL design incorporates elements of effective professional learning as reported by Timperley et al. (2006) in that: (1) expertise external to the group is utilised; (2) conceptual frameworks are utilised which set expectations, serve as a model into which new information can be integrated and provide a basis for reflection; (3) professional learning allows for “multiple cycles of learning” (p.5); (4) teachers’ prior understandings are engaged; (5) teachers’ assumptions are challenged.

The programme utilises the expertise of trained In-School Support Facilitators who are experts in the TL and SLA pedagogy. New understandings and programme expectations are presented in terms of a coherent conceptual framework - the Progress Standards (see Appendix 2) - based on research-informed principles (Ellis, 2005). Improvement in practice is on-going as the three components of the model are inter-related and all three components continue for the whole year. Teachers and trained In-School Support Facilitators use learning conversations to reflect on prior understandings, assumptions and espoused theories (Robinson & Lai, 2006). These conversations enable the facilitators and the teachers to engage with, own and apply new theory and practice, as they test the impact of their practice on their students through shared analysis of the evidence of student use of the TL. The evidence from the verbatim transcripts challenges teachers’ assumptions about language learning and about their expectations of their students. The individualised discussion and reflection on evidence caters for the diversity of teacher learning needs and contexts. Since the student learning outcomes in the progress standards are written in terms of student actions, teacher reflection is focused on the student actions required to increase their meaningful use of TL.

Data were collected at each of the four school observation visits. We now describe the data collection instruments and outline the data collection procedure.

METHOD

Data collection tools included the verbatim transcript of teacher and student use of the TL during the lesson. This consisted of a duplicate book ruled in two, with spaces to record, for Visits 1 and 2, teacher utterances on one side and student utterances on the other and, for Visits 3 and 4, one student’s utterances on one side and a second student’s utterances on the other (the same two students for those two visits). Student verbatim transcripts have advantage over video- or audio-recordings in that the evidence is immediately available for analysis. The facilitator and teacher highlight together the TL utterances of the teacher (in blue) and the students (in orange). This provides immediate visual impact of the quantity and quality of TL used in the lesson.

Other data collection tools used may be found in the Appendices. These were the ‘Evidence of Principles and Strategies’ form (EPS) (Appendix 1), the ‘Progress Standards’ (Appendix 2) and the ‘Summary of Teacher Progress’ for each teacher (Appendix 3). The progress standards are research-based (Ellis, 2006). For each measure, expected and accelerated progress standards are described.

Verbatim transcripts of four lessons were recorded in duplicate by the In-School Facilitator. For each lesson three measures were discussed: (1) the teacher use of the TL; (2) the student use of the TL; and (3) the provision of opportunities for students to participate in interactive and meaningful tasks using the TL as the medium of communication.

Observation Visit 1 occurred before the pedagogy classes started, and baseline data of teacher and student use of TL were recorded. For Observation Visits 2, 3 and 4 the foci were: (Visit 2) teacher use of TL as one strategy to increase student use of TL; (Visit 3) implementation of effective strategies to increase student use of TL in meaningful contexts; (Visit 4) student use of TL in meaningful contexts and evidence of application of the principles of effective instructed language learning.

At Observation Visit 2, teacher and student use of TL were transcribed in a duplicate book. For Observation Visits 3 and 4, the In-School Facilitator sat near two students and wrote a verbatim record of their speech acts.

After each observation, the transcript was read through and TL utterances by teacher and students were highlighted in different colours on the transcript (and transcript copy) by the teacher and the In-School Facilitator. The highlighted transcripts provided then the evidence which the teacher and facilitator summarised together on the EPS form; teacher progress in meeting expected (or accelerated) Progress Standards (Appendix 2) were agreed upon and recorded on the Summary of Teacher Progress form (Appendix 3), and the development needed to meet the expectations for the next visit explained and discussed. Discussions between In-School Facilitators and teachers after lesson observations encouraged teachers to examine and interpret the evidence and see where changes could be made to improve student learning outcomes, in particular in terms of increasing meaningful student use of TL. Fig. 2 (over) summarises the process.

The Summary of Teacher Progress forms were analysed. The analysis involved evidence from 30 teachers of Years 7 and 8. The data collection method is summarised in Fig. 3 (over).
Visit 1 provides baseline data of teacher and student use of target language.

After lesson: Introduction to evidence-based principles of effective instructed language learning as a framework for planning and reflection on lessons. Explanation of expectations for visit 2.

Visit 2 Focus: Teacher use of the TL as one strategy to increase student use of TL.

After lesson: Discussion based on evidence of teacher use of TL as means to effect student use of TL. Recording of ‘evidence of principles and strategies’. Review expected/accelerated progress standards and discuss what standards were met.

Visit 3 Focus: Implementation of effective strategies for increasing student use of TL in meaningful contexts.

After lesson: Discussion based on evidence of teacher & student use of TL. Recording of ‘evidence of principles and strategies’. Review expected/accelerated progress standards and discuss what standards were met.

Visit 4 Focus: Student use of TL in meaningful contexts and evidence of principles of effective instructed language learning

After lesson: Discussion based on evidence of teacher and student use of TL. Recording of ‘evidence of principles and strategies’. Review expected/accelerated progress standards and discuss what standards were met.

Figure 2: In-School Support school visits – Observation foci and discussions

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<tr>
<th>Step 1:</th>
<th>Verbatim transcript evidence of teacher and student use of target language</th>
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<tr>
<td>Step 2:</td>
<td>Highlighting and discussion of transcript with teacher and completion of EPS (Figure 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 3:</td>
<td>Summary of Teacher Progress completed with reference to progress standards (in consultation with teacher). (Figures 3 &amp; 4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Step 4:</td>
<td>Data from Summary of Teacher Progress analysed and graphed (Figures 7-9)</td>
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</table>

Figure 3: Data collection method
RELIABILITY

Reliability was ensured through joint visits, team meetings, shared understanding of the data-gathering tools and discussion of evidence with the teacher. In-school observation visits were made by the Project Director, the Professional Director and three In-School Facilitators. For moderation purposes, the Project and Professional Directors conducted two visits together and then each accompanied an In-school Facilitator on another visit. Because teachers were involved in the discussion of evidence and the completion of the EPS form, agreement was reached before the final progress grade was decided. In-School Facilitators met four times a year, and were able to discuss evidence and agree upon judgments made. The Project Director had copies of all of the data and was able to make a final judgment on the placement on the Progress Standards if required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Increased Teacher TL Use

Evidence from classroom observation data showed considerable shifts in practice and in teachers' language development.

Baseline data

In Visit 1 all teachers used mostly English for social goals, language goals and classroom management. 2 teachers used no target language themselves. 5 teachers used fewer than 10 words or phrases in the target language.

Visits 2 – 4 (See Fig. 4)

In Visit 2, 28 out of 30 teachers used TL for social goals, classroom management and instruction. 13 of the 28 met the accelerated standard, that is, they made significant use of TL for social goals, classroom management and instruction. In fact five teachers used almost entirely TL and five teachers used only TL during the lesson. Four of these teachers who used only or almost only TL in Visit 2 were beginning language learners themselves. The evidence from the verbatim transcript showed that they had learnt sufficient relevant and appropriate formulaic expressions to conduct the lesson in TL, that they complemented this with strategies of modelling rather than instruction and that they had planned lessons around student-centred learning tasks. Furthermore, all teachers supplemented their own use of TL with other sources of TL, such as audio-recordings, wall-charts and posters, readers and reader worksheets, task-sheets, videos. However, teacher input was still the most important source of TL input in all cases.

By Visit 4, all teachers were making significant use of TL for social goals, classroom management and instruction; more than half the teachers used TL for most of their talk with students in a way which was comprehensible and motivating and ensured that teacher talk did not dominate the lesson (this is shown in Appendix 2 as ‘accelerated progress’). It is important to reiterate that the Progress Standards raise the bar at each visit.

The word ‘significant’ in the progress standards refers to teacher use of TL in such a way as it is likely to have a positive impact on student use of the TL. It does include an aspect of quantity – especially when compared with teacher use of English – but not exclusively or necessarily so. A teacher could use a good deal of TL but because of its incomprehensible nature or because of immediate translation into English it could have no positive impact on student use of the TL. On the other hand, where a teacher has planned a lesson requiring very little teacher talk but what little she/he does say is formulaic and comprehensible, this could have a very positive impact on student use of TL and therefore be termed ‘significant use of the TL’.

![Figure 4: Teacher use of TL data from Visits 2-4](image-url)
Increased Student TL Use

**Baseline data**

In Visit 1, in all but one class no formulaic expressions were heard uttered by students in the target language other than a greeting at the start and, in some cases, a farewell at the end of the lesson.

**Visits 2 – 4 (See Fig. 5)**

In Visit 2, students in all but six classes used formulaic expressions in TL in meaningful contexts and in four classes the students’ TL utterances were more than just words and phrases.

In Visit 3, the TL utterances of students in most classes were quantitatively and qualitatively more sophisticated than was evident in visit 2 and in four lesson observations the students were heard to be having extended conversations.

Visit 4 lesson observation data showed that, in all but one teacher’s class, student TL utterances were quantitatively and qualitatively more sophisticated than was evident in Visit 3. In nine classes student use of TL was predominant and displayed a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and multi-clause conversation.

**Provision of opportunities for interaction using tasks**

**Baseline data**

In Visit 1, pair or group work was used either to drill the new language or to brainstorm in English. There was no provision of opportunities for student to student interaction in TL. There was no negotiation of meaning in the TL.

**Visits 2 – 4 (See Fig. 6)**

In Visit 2, all but three teachers had their students working in pairs or groups to complete language tasks. In one class, the students used TL formulaic expressions to cope when communicating in the target language beyond what they had rote learnt.

In Visit 3 all but three of the teachers provided students with opportunities to use the target language as a tool for communication. In over a third of these lesson observations, language tasks successfully moved student oral interaction from words and phrases to sentences and multiple-clause conversations.

By Visit 4, in all but three classes students used the target language to negotiate meaning with each other. In a third of the classes students took ownership of the tasks and were using the TL more than English, displaying a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions to interact in full-class and group activities. The opportunities to interact involved the extended and meaningful use of the TL while completing tasks.

Moreover, the data also showed that teachers increasingly included tasks which were student-student focused and which freed the teacher up to assess and assist the learning. Teachers increasingly provided learning tasks that catered for individual differences. Teachers increasingly provided learning tasks that allowed students to negotiate meaning for a purpose in an extended conversation.
CONCLUSION

The results show that the intended outcomes of the TPDL 2007 were realised. Teachers increased their own and their students’ use of TL. Teachers and students developed a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions. Teachers provided opportunities for their students to interact in meaningful tasks. Teachers reflected on their practice by analysing evidence through an evidence-based theoretical lens and implemented new practice. Their prior understandings and assumptions were challenged, especially in terms of their expectations of how much TL students could produce. Even teachers who were beginner TL learners were able to increase TL use in the classroom through the use of formulaic expressions and a task-based learning approach to teaching.

While the results reported from the TPDL 2007 are pleasing, there is no empirical evidence that teachers’ and students’ levels of TL use have been retained or have increased quantitatively and qualitatively in the years following the professional development programme. Nor do we know whether the students who have experienced success learning a language in Years 7 or 8 while their teacher was participating in TPDL continued with that (or any) language in subsequent years. Further studies into these issues need to be conducted in order to fully evaluate teacher professional development programmes in languages and provide future directions in language teaching and learning in New Zealand schools.

REFERENCES


For further information on the Teacher Professional Development in Languages (TPDL) Years 7-10, a nationwide programme funded by the Ministry of Education, please contact Wendy Thomson (w.thomson@auckland.ac.nz)
### Evidence of Principles and Strategies form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher name:</th>
<th>Dates:</th>
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Evidence from lesson observations 2, 3 and 4 of teachers demonstrating principles, strategies and resources that are effective in improving student achievement in the target language.

1. **Formal chunks in the TL** that students were heard using:

2. These opportunities and communicative tasks allowed the students to **use the language as a tool for communication**, to initiate interactions (in pairs or groups), find their own words and to **negotiate meaning**:

3. **Target language output**
   - (i) You provided the students with the following opportunities for **sustained target language output**:
   - (ii) The **length of the students’ utterances** in the TL heard were:
     - single words / short phrases / full clauses / multiple clause sentences / conversations

4. The following **Learning Intentions** were clear and students were given the opportunity to move on to new learning:
   - **Learning Intentions**:
   - **New learning involved**:

5. In the following ways you provide **TL input** for your students:
   - Using the TL for classroom management:
     - **Entirely TL** 5 4 3 2 1 **Entirely English**
   - Using the TL for social goals:
     - **Entirely TL** 5 4 3 2 1 **Entirely English**
   - Using TL as the medium of instruction:
     - **Entirely TL** 5 4 3 2 1 **Entirely English**
   - Other sources of TL input during the lesson:
   - Sources of TL input outside of the lesson:

6. In these ways you enabled the students to **focus on form**:

7. In these ways in which you catered for **individual differences**:

8. I noticed these indicators of student intrinsic **motivation**:

9. You were able to **assess student learning (receptive and productive)** in the following ways:

10. In these ways you included an **intercultural dimension** and fostered an attitude of interest in, understanding of and **respect** for other cultures:

11. In these ways you steered students towards **fluency**, building up their **implicit knowledge** of the language:

12. The following additional factors positively contribute to student learning:

*Statements prepared with reference to Ellis (2003) and Byram (1997).*
APPENDIX 2

PROGRESS STANDARDS FOR VISITS 2, 3 AND 4

Measuring Progress

Visit 1 provided the baseline picture from which to measure your progress during this PD programme. For subsequent visits:
1. sets the progress standard for teacher use of the TL.
2. sets the progress standard for student use of the TL.
3. sets the progress standard for the provision of opportunities for student interaction in the TL.

Visit 2

Expected progress:
1. Teachers are using TL for social goals, classroom management and instruction.
2. Students show evidence of using the TL in meaningful classroom contexts.
3. Students work in pairs or groups to complete language tasks.

Accelerated progress:
1. Teachers are making significant use of the TL for social goals, classroom management and instruction.
2. Student TL utterances are more than just words and short phrases.
3. There is evidence of students using strategies to cope in the TL.

Visit 3

Expected progress:
1. Teachers are making significant use of the TL for social goals, classroom management and instruction.
2. Student utterances are quantitatively and qualitatively more sophisticated than was evident in visit 2.
3. Teachers are providing students with opportunities to use the TL as a tool for communication.

Accelerated progress:
1. Teachers are using the TL for most of their talk with students in a way which is comprehensible and motivating. Teacher talk does not dominate the lesson.
2. Student utterances are quantitatively and qualitatively more sophisticated than was evident in visit 2 and student use of the TL includes multi-clause conversation.
3. Teachers are providing students with opportunities to use the TL as a tool for communication, with successful outcomes.

Visit 4

Expected progress:
1. Teachers are making significant use of the TL for social goals, classroom management and instruction. Teacher talk does not dominate the lesson.
2. Student utterances are quantitatively and qualitatively more sophisticated than was evident in visit 3.
3. Students are using the TL to negotiate meaning with each other.

Accelerated progress:
1. Teachers are using the TL for most of their talk with students in a way which is comprehensible and motivating. Teacher talk does not dominate the lesson.
2. Student use of the TL is predominant and displays a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and multi-clause conversation in the TL.
3. Students are taking ownership of their interactions in the TL.
## APPENDIX 3

### SUMMARY OF TEACHER PROGRESS

**Summary of teacher progress**

*Teacher name*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher use of target language</th>
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(Profile of teacher)

Notes re each visit