

Responding to the message: Responsive written feedback in a Maori to English transition context.

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ABSTRACT: This paper reports on the writing component of a community and school Maori to English literacy transition programme implemented in a kura kaupapa Maori (Maori language immersion school. 21 Year 6, 7 and 8 students received responsive written feedback for their writing in English, over a ten-week period, during their weekly independent writing time. Students' stories were mailed to a young Maori woman (the third author) in a provincial city 100 kilometres from the kura . She was not known to any of the students prior to the study, but she acted as an interested audience, and responded in writing by focussing on the content or messages in students' stories. She did not provide any corrective feedback on students' writing.

The study employed an intra-subject multiple-baseline research design across four school terms, with the responsive written feedback being introduced sequentially to each of three student Year groups. Measures were taken of total words written, adventurous words written, as well as holistic ratings of audience impact and language quality. Data demonstrate positive gains in both the quantity and quality of students' writing, as well as maintenance of high levels of writing accuracy for all Year groups.

KEYWORDS: New Zealand, Maori Education, biliteracy, bilingual education, responsive written feedback.

Language, literacy, bilingualism and educational achievement

In recent years there has been major growth in Maori immersion and bilingual education with the intended outcome of bilingualism in Maori and English. However, Maori educators and school whanau members are greatly concerned at the lack of evidence detailing effective methodology and practice for transition from Maori to English, the lack of active monitoring and evaluation of specific transition practices and the lack of informed sharing of information between home and school (McKinley & Else, 2002). Maori educators' concerns also focus on when and how transition should occur so that neither language is compromised (Berryman & Glynn, 2003). To a large extent this situation reflects the continued absence of an authoritative languages policy in New Zealand (Peddie, 2003).

Although transition can occur at various points, one of the most challenging points is that between primary and secondary school. Currently, teachers at this level seem to be implementing one of three options. The first is not to compromise students' ongoing Māori language learning at primary school, but hope that when students enter English medium at secondary school they will be able to cope. However, such a laissez-faire approach may leave students ill-prepared and at risk of being diagnosed as having language and literacy deficits in English, while their Maori language strengths are ignored. This can result in feelings of failure, and reluctance to engage in academic programmes. The second option is to introduce English transition once students have reached a specified age, while the third is to introduce English transition to all students within a specific cohort (class group, or year group).

However, none of these options takes into account the wide range of language or literacy proficiency among these students. Further, while options 2 and 3 may utilise teaching strategies from effective ESOL practice, none appears to fully utilise the bilingual language skills and knowledge of the students themselves or the language skills of members of their home community.

When a second language is learned without pressure to replace or reduce first language use, then bilingual learning can take place. People from language minorities can become fluent in both languages, have positive attitudes to both the first and the second language and so maintain ethno-linguistic vitality in the language community, (Baker, 2001). This type of pedagogical approach policy is identified as additive bilingualism, since its aims include students becoming proficient in both languages.

However, learning a second language can also serve assimilationist purposes through the operation of subtractive bilingualism (May, 2002; Waite, 1992). For example, the teaching of English as a second language historically has often aimed at rapidly integrating students from minority language groups into majority language use. In this context, the second language comes to replace the first language. Assimilationist ideology results in the repression of the home and minority language (Wong-Fillmore, 1991) and tends to maintain the dominance of the majority language throughout society (Baker, 2001). In the 1970s the implications of years of English submersion education on bilingual Māori speakers in New Zealand began to emerge (Benton, 1978). This process is still evident within contemporary New Zealand society, which values languages that enhance opportunities for international trade relations and economic growth (such as Japanese and Korean) over languages that underpin the culture and wellbeing of the tangata whenua (indigenous people) of Aotearoa and the languages of Pacific peoples. Such a utilitarian approach appears to ignore the cognitive and social benefits that can result from a principled commitment to bilingual education, and the positive impact that these can have on literacy achievement. Bilingualism in education offers cognitive, cultural and social benefits to participating individuals (Waite, 1992; McCaffery & Tuafui, 2003; May, 2002), and makes a vital contribution to literacy achievement in both languages. For example, (Waite, 1992) indicates that intellectual benefits accrue to bilinguals in the form of increased control over their ability to manipulate language, more divergent thinking and greater mental flexibility. Included amongst this mental flexibility is the ability to gain a greater

insight into the value systems of another culture, its knowledge bases and preferred lifestyles. Such benefits not only increase inter-cultural understanding, but also greatly enhance the ability to understand one's own cultural worldview and its relationships to others.

Culturally and socially responsive pedagogy

Research studies in kohanga reo (language nest) settings in New Zealand (Hohepa, Smith, Smith, & McNaughton, 1992), and in mainstream settings in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1995) demonstrate how critical it is for teachers to appreciate the interdependence between culture and learning. Bishop and Glynn (1999) highlight the importance of the Maori worldview and Maori cultural understandings in improving educational outcomes for Maori students in mainstream schools.

Responsive, social contexts (Glynn, 1985; 1987) in which children learn their first language illustrate the significance of authentic shared interaction between parent and child. The power to decide what the focus of an interaction might be as well as how to initiate and end that interaction is exercised jointly and collaboratively. The roles of teacher and student in this type of learning context are inter-changeable and reciprocal. This reciprocity is embedded in the Maori concept of *ako* (Pere, 1982). Each party in a learning interaction supports, and is supported, by the other. When children initiate oral language interactions, parents and peers act as a responsive audience rather than as correctors or evaluators. (Wheldall & Glynn, 1989) noted that in responsive, social learning contexts, a *“more skilled participant”* adopts *“a more responsive interactive role rather than a custodial role”*. Glynn (1985) characterised these contexts in three ways. First the learner is provided with opportunities to *initiate* as well as to respond to language interactions. Second, there are opportunities for reciprocal learning gains between learner and teacher. Third, learners are provided with feedback that is responsive rather than corrective. For example, when an infant learning to talk indicates that she *“Want go outside!”*, her parents typically respond appropriately to the request, and take her outside, and typically do not engage in corrective feedback on the form and structure of her request.

There is surely a parallel understanding of how children learn to write. Improvement in children's writing may require adults to create similar authentic responsive, social contexts for writing. How students initiate writing and how teachers and others respond to that writing are critical determinants of students' writing progress. (Vargas, 1978) contends that the method by which students are taught to write may be one reason why many of us do not write very well. She notes that the writing of many children may attract very limited reader feedback contingent on the content of their writing, in contrast with the extensive feedback contingent on its form and accuracy.

Students may learn that the form of the message is valued more than its content, (Glynn, Jerram, & Tuck, 1986). Responding only to writing form and structure does not constitute a responsive, social context for learning to write. (Jerram, Glynn, & Tuck, 1988) consider that this type of learning context may result in students choosing to write about only those topics in which they feel they can avoid errors. Māori medium teachers associated with the Poutama Pounamu Research Centre also support this position. They note also that many students learning to write in Maori choose to remain with a single, *“safe”* genre, typically that of personal narrative.

The New Zealand Curriculum English document (Education, 1994) identifies interpersonal language, characterized by the direct exchange among people in conversation, debate, or personal letters as being an essential and natural part of the child's language development and of the English language curriculum. This notion is further supported in the New Zealand Māori Curriculum Maori language document (Ministry of Education, 1996). The challenge for teachers in both English and Maori immersion, is to provide authentic social contexts in which interpersonal written language can be developed through responsive rather than corrective feedback.

However, the limited amount of Maori language being spoken in many homes can pose an additional challenge for Maori medium teachers and parents of children taught in Māori immersion programmes (Smith, 1995; Tangere, 1997). As second language learners many of these students rapidly reach a stage where the amount of Maori language they are hearing and using is insufficient to continue expanding their vocabulary knowledge and fluency. For these second language learners of Maori, a procedure known as responsive written feedback (Jerram et al., 1988) may offer another important literacy context as well as another medium (writing) to supplement students' oral language learning.

The present study builds on the earlier work of Vargas, (1978) and on studies employing responsive written feedback for students' writing (Jerram et al, 1988; Glynn, Berryman, O'Brien, & Bishop, 2000). Jerram et al (1988) reported a study in which a teacher of a class of Year 5 students provided socially responsive written feedback contingent on the content or messages within their writing, rather than providing corrective feedback contingent on spelling or grammatical errors. This study employed an intra-subject, repeated-measures (ABAB) research design and demonstrated marked gains in both the quantity and quality of students' writing during phases when responsive written feedback was provided. Glynn et al (2000) introduced the responsive written feedback procedure with 24 students, from two different schools, who were learning to read and write in Maori. The students were grouped into three sets of four tuakana-teina (tutor-tutee) pairs. The tuakana students within each pair learned to provide effective responsive written feedback for the writing of their teina. Results indicated quantitative and qualitative writing gains for teina students, as well as some improvements in writing quality for tuakana students.

The present study reports on one component of a community-initiated home and school literacy programme designed to improve the transition of students from Maori immersion education to English immersion education. The 10-week programme was implemented collaboratively between students, whanau (extended family), school staff, and researcher (the second author) and incorporated both reading and writing components, although only the writing component is reported here. Following the completion of the programme, collaborative storying (Bishop, 1996) was used to develop a shared understanding with participants of how their role in the programme had contributed to the success of the outcomes, (Berryman & Glynn, 2003).

Method

Programme Initiation

Kura staff and whanau approached the Ministry of Education *Poutama Pounamu Education Research Centre* for assistance in devising an English transition programme for their students. After the second author had agreed to participate, programme parameters were collaboratively negotiated and the reading tutoring and two writing components were selected.

Research Design

The study employed an intra-subject multiple baseline comparison across three groups of students, with repeated-measurements taken across all groups at one-term intervals from pre-programme to maintenance. The programme began in term 4, 2001 with the group of Year 8 students. In term one 2002, the programme was introduced to a new group of Year 8 students (former Year 7s). In term two 2002 it was introduced to a third group of students (former Year 6s, who were now in Year 7).

Participants

Students: 21 Year 6, 7 and 8 students participated. All had been in Māori language immersion for the majority of their primary schooling, and most since *kōhanga reo* (pre-school). Although all students were exposed daily to English language in the community and through the media, only one had received any formal instruction in English.

Liaison teacher: The teacher of the Year 7 and 8 students was crucial to the success of the programme. She liaised with the community and collaborated with the researchers in programme delivery, evaluation and data collection. She contacted students' parents, and whānau members through the Board of Trustees to explain the nature of training and support provided as well as the commitment required of the whānau and community tutors. The liaison teacher also monitored tutors' weekly tutoring, assisted in accessing appropriate reading material and provided informal feedback on their tutoring. Her focus was to support the kura to maintain their consultation and partnership with their community. Students' literacy growth in both languages was seen as a process that was occurring simultaneously at home and at school through the careful co-ordination of activities and exchange of information between these two settings (McNaughton & Glynn, 1998).

Tutors for English transition: A range of people were trained as tutors - *kaumātua*, *kuia*, parents, grandparents, young men and young women - and tutoring occurred either at school or at home.

The writing responder: A young Maori woman from outside the community (the third author) provided weekly responsive written feedback for the English writing of all students.

The responsive written feedback procedure: The responder incorporated any of the following components in her continuous written feedback:

- Identifying with the writer's theme
- Personalising the response
- Identifying with any of the characters in the writing
- Conversing with the writer
- Empathising with the writer

Enjoying the content of the writing
 Sharing an experience with the writer
 Anticipating the development of a theme

Written feedback focussed on responding to the messages within a student's writing sample and not on structure, error correction or evaluative comments. However, in her written feedback the responder was free to model the correct spelling of a word or the correct grammatical form of any error that had occurred in the student's previous writing sample. Writing completed in the classroom was then mailed to the responder who provided her written feedback and returned the students' writing books ready for the next week's writing time. This procedure continued over at least ten cycles.

The structured brainstorming procedure: The liaison teacher introduced a second procedure in the classroom to help students collaborate in collecting and collating English vocabulary items prior to writing a story. A structured brainstorm procedure (Whitehead 1993) was carried out once a fortnight. Regular and focused teacher and student brainstorms of interesting words and collating these words into groups were important components of the programme and occurred at least once a fortnight.

Treatment Integrity: Following training, repeated measures of parent, whānau and community reading and writing tutoring were taken in order to establish the degree to which target programme strategies, e.g. the components of responsive written feedback, were being implemented (Berryman & Glynn, 2003).

Collecting the writing samples: Although students were free to write on any topic they liked, photographs and prompt words were provided to assist students if required. Photographs depicted familiar and positive interaction between adults and children in contemporary Māori settings. Up to ten minutes were allowed for students to choose their topic and for a brief informal discussion which did *not* involve any form of written planning. Next, students were asked to begin their ten minutes of writing. Five further minutes were allowed for editing and proof reading.

Analysis of writing assessment data: Assessment of writing employed a definition of errors that included punctuation, spelling, unrecognisable words, unclear messages, incorrect language structures and tenses. Analysis of writing samples provided data on writing rate, accuracy, and quality (holistic ratings of audience impact and overall language quality). The increasing number of more difficult ("adventurous") words that students were using in their writing was also measured. The spelling levels from the Alphabetical Spelling List, based on relative frequencies of occurrence of words in student writing, (Arvidson, 1977), were used to define adventurous words as words students used in their writing that were either level 4 and above, or words that were beyond level 7 (the top level in the Arvidson list). Adult readers, who were unaware of students' names or of the order in which the writing samples had been gathered, provided independent holistic ratings of each sample, using a seven point scale of audience impact and language quality

Results

Table 1. Quantitative measures of students writing in English
Mean pre and post programme data in multiple baseline format

	TOTAL WORDS			
Year 8 Students (n=7)	68	101	132	113
Year 7 Students (n=7)	67	65	99	95
Year 6 Students (n=7)	55	42	109	124

	TOTAL WORDS (% ACCURACY)			
Year 8 Students (n=7)	91	92	92	90
Year 7 Students (n=7)	87	83	84	89
Year 6 Students (n=7)	84	86	78	93

	ADVENTUROUS WORDS			
Year 8 Students (n=7)	17	31	45	41
Year 7 Students (n=7)	18	16	29	22
Year 6 Students (n=7)	13	12	40	40

	ADVENTUROUS WORDS (% ACCURACY)			
Year 8 Students (n=7)	82	84	87	88
Year 7 Students (n=7)	72	69	79	82
Year 6 Students (n=7)	69	75	53	93

Table 1 presents mean writing outcome data for the three groups of students (Year 8, Year 7, Year 6) on four different measures (total words written, percentage accuracy of words written, number of adventurous words written and percentage accuracy of adventurous words). Each column represents a measure taken at the end of successive

school terms. Data in Table 1 illustrate pre and post programme changes in students' writing. The solid "staircase" lines indicate the times at which each Year group entered the community and school literacy programme.

On the measure of total words written there were major gains for Year 8 and Year 7 students corresponding with their time in the programme (33 words for Year 8 and 34 words for Year 7). There was also a smaller gain for Year 6 students (15 words). However, these Year 6 students had already displayed a major gain at the last pre-programme assessment. Table 1 shows also that the gains in total words written by Year 8 and year 7 students were maintained at assessment points beyond time these students were in the programme.

On the measure of accuracy of words written, Total Words (% accuracy), all Year groups maintained a high level of writing accuracy throughout the entire project, from pre-programme to post programme, (ranging from 78% to 93%). Overall, while all groups markedly increased their writing rate (total words written) from pre programme to post programme and maintained or increased their accuracy at follow-up assessment points, there was no evidence of loss in accuracy of words written. Indeed, in the case of Year 6 students, there was an increase in accuracy, (15%), corresponding with entry into the programme.

Table 1 also presents data on adventurous words written. As was the case for total words written, there were major gains corresponding with programme entry for students in two Year groups. These gains were 14 for Year 8 students and 13 for Year 7 students. There was, however, no corresponding gain for Year 6 students. For total words written, Year 8 and year 7 students maintained their gains on adventurous words written beyond the period of time they were in the programme.

On the measure of accuracy of adventurous words written, Adventurous words (%accuracy), there were small gains for Year 8 students (2%) and Year 7 students (10%), despite each of these groups now writing many more adventurous words. In contrast, the Year 6 students, (who showed no gain in the number of adventurous words written between their last pre-programme measure and their entry into the programme), displayed a major gain in accuracy (40%). Hence these data on rate and accuracy of adventurous words written parallel those for rate and accuracy of total words written. The marked gains in writing rate were not accompanied by decreases in accuracy.

Table 2. Qualitative measures of students writing in English
Mean pre and post programme data in multiple baseline format

	AUDIENCE IMPACT (1 to 7 Rating Scale)			
Year 8 Students (n=7)	2	3	4	4
Year 7 Students (n=7)	2	2	3	3
Year 6 Students (n=7)	2	2	3	4

	LANGUAGE QUALITY (1 to 7 Rating Scale)			
Year 8 Students (n=7)	2	3	4	4
Year 7 Students (n=7)	2	2	3	3
Year 6 Students (n=7)	2	2	3	4

Table 2 presents mean data on the two qualitative measures of students' writing, (audience impact and language quality). Each cell entry represents a mean rating on a seven-point rating scale, from 1 (low) to 7 (high). Raters were fluently bilingual in both Māori and English, but they were naïve as to the names or Year levels of writers and the order in which the writing samples were gathered.

On the measure of audience impact, the pre programme ratings for all groups' writing were generally low (2.0 to 3.0). However, there was a gain of one rating point for all three Year groups, corresponding to their time of entry into the transition programme (3.0 to 4.0). Year 8 students gained one further rating point at the assessment following programme, while Year 7 students maintained their rating at the assessment point following the programme. Only Year 6 students increased their ratings (from 2.0 to 3.0) between pre programme assessments 2 and 3 and gained a further point (from 3.0 to 4.0) after entry into the programme.

On the measure of language quality, the pattern of increases in ratings received was identical to that for audience impact. All three Year groups increased their ratings of language quality by one scale point from pre programme to post programme assessment (2.0 to 3.0). Year 8 and Year 7 students maintained these ratings at follow-up points. Again, Year 6 students received a gain of one rating point between pre programme assessments 2 and 3, and gained a further point (from 3.0 to 4.0) after entry into the programme. Year 8 and Year 7 students maintained or improved these gains at follow up assessments.

Overall, data in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that gains in rate and accuracy of for all three sets of students corresponded to the time of entry into the transition programme. Students made gains in writing rate (total number of words written), at no loss to their level of accuracy. Students also showed major increases in the number of adventurous (low-frequency) words used in their writing in English, and this also occurred at no cost to accuracy. There were also marked improvements in ratings of students' writing on the two independent qualitative measures of audience impact and language quality. In the main these gains also corresponded to the times at which each set of students completed their time in programme.

The following sample provides an indication of the nature of these transition students' writing in English and the nature of the responsive written feedback provided. This sample preserves Huia's original spelling and structure.

Writing Sample: Huia

I enjoy kapa haka competitions because....

When you are on the stage you feel so happy and so excited and very proud standing up there on the stage for your family and your hapu and iwi. The kapa haka is oright sometimes to me, but to ather children it's cool and it's dum.

Our tutors are working hard on us for last three or four weeks till now. They are still working hark on us. They play games with us sometimes. We all like our tutors even though they are hard on us we still like them, and we are very lucky to have them with us. When I was in the little team I was the leader, and the next team it was me and my best friend the two leaders.

Soli's response: *Kia Ora Huia,*

Thank you for sharing with me your story about why you enjoy kapa haka competitions. I agree with you that when you are on stage that it is exciting and you feel so proud. I would get really nervous before we would go on, thinking that I would forget the actions or I would drop my poi but I would manage to do all right.

Like you, our tutors would give us a hard time especially one lady called Mrs M. She would growl you in front of everyone so loudly that you would go red in the face. It was really embarrassing!!! I take it that you have been performing in a kapa haka group for quite sometime, am I right? I hope you are still enjoying it in many years to come.

Awesome story, Huia. Your effort for trying is now beginning to pay off. Your writing is improving each time you write. Keep it up and looking forward to your next story.

This example of responsive, written feedback illustrates the extent to which the responder, Soli, was able to understand the messages in these students' writing, and make powerful connections with the writers even though at the outset of the study

she did not know them at all. This example personalises and contextualises the information represented in the quantitative and qualitative data reported above. It illustrates how Soli was able to identify clearly with the themes in the story, and personalise her response to the writer through conversing easily with her, and connecting her own experiences and feelings with Huia's. Soli identified closely with Huia about feeling excited at being on stage in the kapa haka competitions, about still liking your kapa haka tutors, even though they may be hard on you. Through the medium of writing, Soli soon established a deep and personal relationship with the students that proved highly motivating for them. They became very keen to read their feedback from Soli each week, and just as keen to write back to her immediately.

Discussion

As a result of the community and school transition programme, students within each of the three Year groups achieved substantial positive gains in writing in English. Data indicated that the increases in the quantity and quality of students' writing did not occur at the expense of accuracy. Berryman & Glynn (2003) report parallel increases in students' reading level and comprehension, without loss in accuracy. Furthermore they present evidence to show that the successful transition to reading and writing in the target language (English) for all three groups did not compromise students' continuing high progress in reading and writing in the non-target language (Māori).

Overall, students' writing gains in this study were associated specifically with the introduction of the transition programme in accord with the multiple baseline format. Gains were evident for each of the three Year groups at the assessment points directly following their entry to the programme, and these gains maintained at subsequent assessment points following programme completion.

There was only one exception to this pattern. Data on some of the writing measures for Year 6 students suggest that these students may have benefited from the writing programme being delivered to the Year 7 students (who were in the same classroom) before the Year 6 students "officially" entered the programme. This is particularly noticeable in Table 1 where the total words written more than doubled and the total adventurous words written more than trebled for Year 6 students in the last assessment before they entered the programme. In Table 2 also, the independent ratings of audience impact and language quality for Year 6 students show a corresponding one-point gain at the same pre-programme assessment point. Interestingly, while the *number* of words written by Year 6 students increased at this pre-programme assessment point, *accuracy* did not improve until after the students had entered the transition programme. At this time, the liaison teacher was introducing the structured brainstorming procedures into the classroom writing programme for Year 7 students. There may have been some "spill over" effects from this onto the Year 6 students, for example, exposing them to seeing and hearing a greater range of English vocabulary. Furthermore, whānau members and community tutors who had already been trained in the reading tutoring procedures may have exchanged advice, information and support with whānau members of non-programme students. Indeed

teachers, parents and other whānau and community members were explicitly encouraged to share such advice, information and support.

Generally, the independent qualitative ratings for audience impact and language quality of the writing samples show increases from pre-programme to programme entry, and these maintained beyond the completion of the programme. The size of these increases typically was limited to one point on the seven-point scale, usually showing movement from 2.0 to 3.0, or from 3.0 to 4.0. The finding that these independent ratings detected positive shifts that corresponded with students' 10-week period in the programme is educationally significant and worthwhile. However, as the highest rating recorded on the seven-point scale was 4.0, raters clearly indicated that there was still considerable room for improvement on these holistic qualitative measures.

Although only writing data have been reported here, it must be acknowledged that the responsive written feedback procedure was only one component of the total transition programme. At the same time as each Year group was experiencing responsive written feedback for their independent writing at school, they were also receiving extensive individual reading tutoring at home and at school. It is highly likely that students' reading and writing gains were mutually supportive and beneficial. Indeed the transition programme was specifically designed to maximise the interconnection between writing and reading. Clearly similar results could not be expected if either the reading or the writing components were implemented in isolation of the other.

Much of the success of this community and school literacy transition programme can be attributed to the total interconnectedness that developed between whānau members and school staff. Literacy is acquired in responsive social contexts (Glynn, 1985; 1987) that reflect the cultural values and practices of the families in the community. Although there is often a mismatch between the values and practices of the community and the school, in this study the relationships that developed between whānau and kura appeared far stronger than the relationships that occur between parents and teachers in other schools. This whānau and kura took ownership and control of the entire programme, including inviting the second author to act as researcher and negotiating the particular research procedures and evaluation strategies to be employed.

This whānau demonstrated what can happen when a community and school, with a shared vision of their children becoming competent bilingual learners, collaborate closely within their own cultural context. The Māori language and cultural practices, as maintained and modelled by their kaumātua and kuia, provided the basis on which to construct a successful English transition programme. These students were high achievers in reading and writing within their own language and culture and from this position of strength they were able to make a smooth and successful transition to reading and writing in English.

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