
High Level Executive Summary: *Quality Teaching, Research and Development Samoan Bilingual Hub*

BACKGROUND

The Quality Teaching Research and Development Project (QTR&D) was funded by the Ministry of Education. The project was developed collaboratively between the ministry, university academics, research facilitators, schools, teachers, students and their communities. The tenet was that teacher inquiry, supported by productive learning partnerships, is a critical contributing factor to improving the quality of teaching and learning outcomes for students. QTR&D was established initially in three settings: Samoan bilingual; Māori medium; and English medium.

The focus of this summary is the Samoan bilingual hub. This QTR&D hub was set up to improve the quality of teaching and learning (pedagogy and student outcomes) in Samoan bilingual school settings. The project outcomes will inform policy, and future research and development work with teachers in schools.

QTR&D project principles

The principles that underpin the design of QTR&D include:

- recognition that ‘culture counts’
- use of ako (reciprocal teaching and learning)
- development of productive partnerships and joint construction of knowledge and learning processes by all participants
- use of multiple, structured opportunities to learn
- development of high quality evidence-based practices to enhance Māori and Pasifika student outcomes
- use of collective inquiry processes which engage teachers’ personal theories
- development of culturally inclusive and responsive learning communities.

QTR&D WITHIN A SAMOAN BILINGUAL HUB

The general achievement of Pasifika students, including Samoan students, in English literacy has been identified as a major challenge for education in New Zealand. Although our student achievement in literacy is known to be high internationally, research has identified that Māori and Pasifika students are over-represented in our “long tail” of underachievement.

Samoan students make up the majority of Pasifika students in New Zealand schools. Of these most are in English medium classrooms. This QTR&D hub focussed on the learning of Samoan students in bilingual classrooms.

The Samoan bilingual hub project explored Samoan bilingual (SB) teacher practice, and sought to identify effective pedagogies that will lift the achievement of Samoan students in a bilingual classroom environment.

Prior to this project little research had been undertaken in Samoan bilingual classrooms so not much is known about the nature of teaching and learning in them, nor how the two languages of instruction, English and Samoan are used. There is also little information about why Samoan students opt for bilingual education, or why schools set up bilingual classrooms.

Outcomes from this research show that the most common reason for having bilingual Samoan/English classrooms among these five schools is that parents have asked for it. Parents believe that bilingual teaching will help strengthen the language, through which their culture will be maintained. They believe that if their children are knowledgeable about and confident in their culture then academic achievement will improve. Samoan bilingual programmes are a relatively recent development within New Zealand schools and there have been relatively few professional learning and development opportunities to specifically support bilingual teaching in these schools.

Local research has identified effective pedagogical practices for Pasifika students in English medium classrooms (Phillips, McNaughton and MacDonald, 2004). These practices include:

- a common instructional framework for teaching literacy
- collaboration between teachers to implement the programme over a sustained period
- long-term support between schools and external support agencies
- use of evidence to guide and evaluate teaching practices
- planning of teaching programmes that meet the specific needs of the students
- development of collective analytic and problem solving skills where teachers, researchers and professional developers collaborate to co-construct the professional development
- distribution of the professional expertise within and across schools.

This knowledge, combined with the principles established for QTR&D projects, was used as the basis for planning the Samoan bilingual hub.

OVERVIEW OF THE QTR&D RESEARCH APPROACH AND PARTICIPANTS

The project was underpinned by a belief that enabling SB teachers to focus on collaborative inquiry and evidence-based pedagogy would see them improving learning outcomes for Samoan learners in bilingual classrooms.

There were 12 teachers working in five different schools in the Samoan bilingual hub. These five schools had worked as a cluster before this QTR&D project began. The teachers were a mix of beginning, experienced and senior Samoan teachers. All had graduated with a first degree and all were studying towards postgraduate qualifications.

A total of 65 students from Year 1 to Year 8 were involved in the project. They were in the bilingual programme as a result of families' requests. In the majority of their

homes Samoan language was spoken frequently in regular family settings as well as social and church events.

As part of the QTR&D project the teachers were enrolled in a university course worth 30 points, divided into two 15-point components and spread over two semesters. The purpose of the course was to develop the teachers' understandings about the research process, and to encourage them to engage in systematic inquiry into their own bilingual teaching practices. The learning outcomes for this course were to:

- review and examine theoretical and pedagogical perspectives underpinning literacy education
- analyse their own classroom practice relevant to literacy learning contexts using an action research inquiry
- conduct an action research inquiry within the relevant area of practice.

In addition to the course the teachers had access to reading and writing workshops conducted by their cluster of schools. They were also encouraged to work collaboratively with fellow participants in their own school to discuss the purpose, process and progress on their research.

The QTR&D project made provision for a research facilitator (RF) and a research coordinator (RC) to work with the teacher participants. Despite some issues with the appointments and workloads of the facilitator and coordinator their defined roles were to support the teachers to carry out research in their own classrooms. Most of the teachers had little previous experience of classroom research.

The RF worked as an external learning partner, co-researcher and co-inquirer with the participating teachers. Their late appointment delayed the group's ability to develop common goals, understandings, protocols and practices. But by the end the RF had contributed to strengthening and clarifying the purpose and goals of the QTR&D hub.

The RC who lectured in the university course helped ensure that the course was appropriate and relevant to the needs of the participating SB teachers. In particular the RC helped the teachers understand the theoretical underpinnings and frameworks for their research work.

As a result of the university course and in conjunction with their cluster work, the teachers selected an action research project designed around meeting the needs of their students in order to improve the students' learning outcomes in literacy. The RC and RF supported them in this project.

Each teacher chose an aspect of their literacy work where they wanted to improve both their own practice and their students' learning. They conducted pre- and post-intervention tests of the students' work, engaged in critical reflection either orally with colleagues or in journals, applied new practices gained from their course work and/or in collaboration with their colleagues in order to achieved their valued outcomes.

This summary acknowledges that prior to implementation of the QTR&D project the teachers involved had little opportunity for effective professional learning to enhance their abilities as classroom teachers. There is an emerging body of research on bilingual teaching, and this project enabled a focus on Samoan bilingual learners in New Zealand. The teachers felt that their previous experiences of professional development had not prepared them, in either content or pedagogical knowledge for specialist bilingual teaching.

FINDINGS

- Because each study selected by participating teachers was specific to the needs of their students they produced results from which it would be difficult to generalise. Nevertheless some shifts in achievement for the Samoan students in a bilingual context were made.

Factors that could improve these outcomes further were identified (see the positive perceptions and concerns section for more detail).

- The most constructive, informative and effective aspects of the QTR&D project provided the teachers with new skills for diagnosing their students' needs, and for planning or mapping their pedagogical practices to meet those needs.
- The QTR&D principles and the way they were implemented provided a variety of opportunities for learning over a year. There were the formal structured university course, occasions to consult and work alongside an external expert, formal and informal communities of professional colleagues with whom to share ideas and reflect critically, opportunities for self analysis and critique. Some of the SB teacher participants commented that these approaches modelled good practice which they could use in their classrooms with the students.
- The teachers recognised that culture is an integral part of student learning and tried to address this in their action research projects. It enabled the teachers to “tune into” their students' learning reinforcing that culture counts, and also to “tune into” their own learning. They reported that they were able to learn more from the QTR&D hub than when they participate in professional development designed for English medium settings.

This highlights an issue that both principals and providers of professional development may need to take into account. The specific and specialist needs of Pasifika teachers in bilingual contexts should be taken into account to ensure that they benefit fully from all professional learning opportunities.

- The teachers gained a clearer understanding of the purpose and goals of bilingual teaching, and of the possibilities for improving literacy learning outcomes for bilingual Samoan students. This will support them to help their schools clarify, understand and implement more successful bilingual policies and practices.
- The project revealed the need for more research on the process and impact of Samoan bilingual education, and for the development of diagnostic assessment material in Samoan. The development of these materials could help teachers to identify students' ability to use their language resources in both social and academic contexts. The materials would also improve teachers' ability to plan appropriate bilingual pedagogical approaches and therefore determine the impact of these approaches with greater accuracy.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS

- The SB teachers formed partnerships and collaborative groups in their schools. Where there were other QTR&D projects going on these partnerships spread across them, involving both English medium and SB teachers. Teachers shared their ideas and there were examples of modifications and fine-tuning of teachers' inquiries as a result of these exchanges.

The involvement of people external to the school, for example the RF and RC also assisted in developing these professional partnerships.

- The inclusion of evidence-based reading and research in the course requirements and their use in other shared workshops developed teachers' understanding of how evidence can help their pedagogical practice and improve outcomes for students. It helped them to interpret what was going on in their classrooms and modify what they were doing. The SB teachers enjoyed and began to implement the concept of the teacher researcher who can diagnose, analyse, problem-solve and evaluate their own professional work.
- The QTR&D approach to teacher professional learning strengthened the teachers' awareness that culture counts and had an impact on student learning outcomes. Teachers became more conscious of how home and cultural practices and the diversity of these have an impact on what happens in the classroom. For example, more consideration was given to how and when ako (reciprocal teaching and learning) could be used in the context of Samoan bilingual teaching.

The Samoan value of the teacher as elder/expert, and the student as younger/novice may be an initial barrier that needs addressing before classroom reciprocity can be introduced successfully.

- There were some administrative and planning issues that caused concern and may have hindered the achievements of the QTR&D project particularly in the beginning. For example: late appointments of personnel; some confusion in the communications with schools and principals; level of teacher experience; clarity about the requirements for entry to the university course; issues with content knowledge both of some teachers and the level required by the course itself.
- The project provided more information about the Samoan bilingual teaching context, revealing a number of areas that need further research and development. It showed for example how much diagnostic and formative assessment in Samoan could help both teachers and students. Even though teachers had to write their own specific Samoan language assessments for this project, which took a lot of time and professional effort, this did provide more accurate feedback to students about their learning.

There is still more to be learned about the balance that is needed in the bilingual context between the use of English and of Samoan. Further to that there needs to be more investigation about students' language background and capabilities, and what impact these have on achievement outcomes.

These and the issues of the lack of clarity about the purpose of bilingual teaching in Samoan and the contribution it makes to Samoan students' overall achievement remain concerns to be investigated further.