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Reclaiming and reframing
teacher education in Aotearoa New Zealand



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Special Interest Group report: Learning languages in ITE

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A small but enthusiastic group of teacher educators met to discuss the opportunities and challenges for teacher educator programmes that have arisen from the inclusion of the new *Learning Languages* learning area in the New Zealand Curriculum. Participants came from a range of experiences of language learning and teaching and were keen to hear what is being offered to cater for this learning area in initial teacher education programmes for the primary and secondary sectors in particular. The group was facilitated by Adèle Scott, who outlined the development of the new learning area, along with findings from her doctoral study about the identity, role and place of teachers of languages in New Zealand schools. Key themes central to the discussion are set out in the report below.

The place of Te Reo Māori

Te Reo Māori has a special place in the New Zealand education system. Although it is acknowledged in the New Zealand Curriculum alongside New Zealand Sign Language (the other official language of New Zealand), its place alongside other languages in the *Learning Languages* learning area is not clear. While it is critical that the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi are upheld, including the understanding that Te Reo Māori be maintained and promoted across all learning contexts, in practice it is often the case that access to this language is limited to those students wishing to learn the language as a subject in its own right. This is the case for students in schools and initial teacher education courses alike.

Differences between the sectors

Traditionally, specialist teachers have taught languages in the secondary sector during allocated time slots. However, the offerings to students at the pre-secondary level are extremely varied, ranging from regular opportunities to learn with a non-specialist classroom teacher—sometimes even integrated into other learning areas—to specialist input by someone from outside the school community, after school hours, at a cost to parents. The content of languages programmes at this pre-secondary level is also varied and is often dependent on the teacher's own proficiency and experience in the language. At tertiary level, students who enter an initial teacher education programme without prior knowledge in a language they might wish to teach are at a disadvantage to those



who already have some fluency in another language, as there is little time allocated within initial teacher education programmes for developing proficiency in languages.

Expertise in languages

Given the increasing cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity of the New Zealand population, it is safe to assume that staff and students bring an ever-increasing number of languages onto school and university campuses around the country, regardless of whether or not there are opportunities to teach/learn those languages. Acknowledging this diversity can be highlighted through the connection between home-language and identity as schools seek to be more inclusive around students and families. In addition, initial teacher education programmes can promote teaching strategies that acknowledge and celebrate the ethnic, cultural and linguistic richness of the classrooms within which teacher education students will practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges for initial teacher education (ITE) programmes are to develop programmes that ensure that ITE students have the respect, curiosity and foundation knowledge to equip them to use and increase their own knowledge of Te Reo Māori. ITE programmes also need to be enabled to make the most of the existing resources (languages in the school staffroom/classrooms and wider community) as they seek to meet the opportunities that the *Learning Languages* area provides. Providers of ITE could begin this by sharing models of practice with students who wish to offer meaningful language learning experiences to their own students.

The TEFANZ website could host a dedicated area for special interest groups to share professional ideas, post questions and upload relevant documents and links. Given the challenges mentioned above, it would be useful to have access to an expertise database, support groups and resources related to ITE languages programmes as well as having direct access to resources related to specific languages of interest.

Ka nui te mihi ki a koutou mōu koutou mahi i ngā reo.