

Deliberate acts of language learning: A support for teachers and learners of te reo Māori

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KEY POINTS

- Deliberate acts of language learning (DALLs) support students to be effective second-language learners.
- The approach makes effective language-learning strategies explicit to students.
- This article offers advice to teachers about how language-learning strategies can be implemented in the classroom.
- It is based on the benefits noticed in professional development and learning with teachers in Māori-medium settings.
- The DALLs approach is useful to teaching te reo Māori in Māori-medium contexts as well within the Learning Languages learning area of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Common approaches to language teaching in many New Zealand schools typically show a lack of attention to students' own language-learning strategies. This article argues that the success or otherwise of language immersion programmes, in particular within Māori-medium educational settings, depend as much on the skills and strategies of the student as on those of the teacher. Raising the language-learning skills of the students in non-immersion Māori language programmes would likewise be beneficial. A strategy, called the deliberate acts of language learning (DALLs), is presented as a solution.

Deliberate acts of language learning—Introduction

Language teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand schools can be considered in two primary forms. The immersion or dual-language model which is most commonly found in programmes aiming to expand the use of the Māori language in Māori-medium contexts, and the Learning Languages learning area of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) (NZC), applicable to English-medium contexts, where the language is studied as a subject. Such programmes encourage using the target language as much as possible as the language of instruction (East, 2017).

The immersion or dual-language model is considered to be when the target language is the language of instruction for all or most of the curriculum. My experience as a Māori-medium professional learning and development facilitator has shown me that many teachers assume that their students naturally know how to learn a second language, with many of their students learning te reo Māori after initially learning English in their early years. However, research suggests that relying on natural acquisition is not the most effective path for additional language learning—successful language programmes are dependent, among other things, on learners understanding how to access, retain, and use the language for their own communicative purposes.

Zohar and David (2008) suggest that an effective practice in language-learning classrooms is for skills and strategies to be taught explicitly with learners taking responsibility for their own learning, a view shared by Ellis (2012) and Lewis (2002). Hattie (2007), in a presentation of his meta-analysis of teaching/learning strategies, rated metacognition as very effective, with an effect size of 0.67. Hence it makes sense for teachers to support students to think about their language-learning

process and the strategies that students can consciously draw on to help them learn.

This article presents an approach which draws on the principles of:

- learner agency
- explicit teaching of skills and strategies
- metacognition.

The deliberate acts of language learning (DALLs) approach has been developed in response to requests from Māori-medium teachers for support in this area. I have helped teachers to introduce DALLs into the classroom programmes of six Auckland Māori-immersion and dual-language units over the past 6 years, effectively functioning as a pilot programme. Feedback from teachers implementing DALLs approach has been positive (see the last section of this article).

The DALLs approach complements the deliberate acts of teaching (DATs) approach (Ministry of Education, 2003) by focusing on the student's learning strategies rather than the teachers' teaching strategies. Both approaches encourage teachers to provide explicit instruction to learners on how to be effective learners. DALLs supports students to develop language-learning strategies that can help them to establish lifelong language-learning practices and routines.

The approach advocated in this article is for students to take responsibility for and exercise control over their own learning, as suggested by East (2017) and exemplified in the task based language teaching model. Similarly, in immersion settings it is beneficial for learners to exercise control over their learning. As East (2017) also notes, there has been a move in language teaching away from the teacher led model. However, from my observations, a teacher led model known as the "Initiate Respond Evaluate (IRE)" model (see Gibbons 2015 for a closer analysis) is used widely in schools and is manifested most often in teacher questioning. For example:

Teacher: “What comes after Hereturikōkā?”¹

Student: “Mahuru.”

Teacher: “Ka pai e tama.”

IRE has the effect of teachers controlling and defining what learners learn, what East (2017) refers to as teacher-fronted. My personal experience, consistent with international research (see Ellis, 1997, Lewis 2002), indicates that the “Observe, Hypothesize, Experiment (OHE)” model (Lewis 2008, p. 6) is a more effective language-learning approach where the learner:

- notices and attends to new language
- thinks about what it means, what purposes it fulfils, and how it works
- then tries it out.

OHE, in contrast to the IRE approach, allows the learner much more control of their learning. It is a non-linear approach appropriate to the web-like, holistic, nature of language where words have multiple connections to other words/concepts.

The DALLs approach draws on theories of language acquisition which underpin OHE, and the principle of learners learning how to be learners. DALLs provides teachers with tools they can use to explicitly guide and teach students to become more effective language learners. This article argues that DALLs helps learners to respond more positively to their own communication needs. A similar approach in Australia with a multilevel Adult Migrant English Program Certificate class has been researched by Slikas Barber (2012) who reports that, “being mindful of, collecting, noticing and doing things with language in the learner’s environment over a ten week term of study gave the students the understanding and skills necessary to use this strategy to enhance their own learning” (p.11)

An elaboration of the DALLs Approach

This section discusses the elements that make up the DALLs approach to strengthening learners’ language-learning strategies. The elements are intended to be integrated, working together to create an effective learning strategy.

Noticing

Noticing (Schmidt, 2001 and Ellis, 1997) has been identified as a primary language-learning strategy. Noticing requires the learner to actively attend to new language. The effective second-language learner notices:

- new language
- its form and function
- the lexical chunk that conveys the meaning.

Form refers to the way language is constructed and *function* to the way it is used (Schmidt, 2010). This

suggests that giving attention to both form and function, by helping students to notice them, would help to move the input (the language to which the student is being exposed) to long-term memory.

Rather than just focusing on single lexical items, the DALLs advocates focusing on lexical chunks. The lexical chunk is the collection or group of words that conveys meaning (Lewis 2002). Ellis (2001) reports that it is now widely accepted that lexical items, chunks, and formulaic expressions are the essential building blocks of language. These become the basis of a learner’s internal construction of grammar rules (Ellis, 2001; Lewis, 2002)

The Lexical Approach (Lewis, 2002) argues that it is the learning of the whole lexical chunk that is of the greatest value to the learner. Learners then should not attend just to a new word, but also to the lexical chunk, which includes information about how that word can be used. The lexical chunk provides a model for how a first-language speaker would use that word.

Individual words can change in meaning depending on the words around them. For example, in the phrases “whai mai” and “he tangata whai mana” the word *whai* carries different meanings according to context. An English-language example might be, “he went to the bank”, and, “he stood on the bank”.

In the classroom, noticing is encouraged through the teacher both modelling the strategy and explicitly instructing learners to attend to new language. Teacher modelling would look like this:

Teacher: “Ei! Titiro ki tēnei kīanga hou i roto i tā tātou pukapuka! Ka rawe!”

Together, the teacher and students would unpack the meaning of the utterance. Explicit instruction would look like this:

Teacher: “Rapua ētehi atu kīanga hou, ka kōrerotia tahitia ai e tātou.”

Where I have supported teachers to introduce the DALLs, they make noticing both form and function an explicit expectation, and guide learners to notice new language as a routine approach.

Collecting

Having noticed new language, the learner adds it to their language kete. Students come to understand that their task is to become collectors of language (Lewis 2002, Thornbury 2002) and this attitude to learning is modelled and affirmed by the teacher.

Teacher: “Ka pai Hera, kua kohia e koe ngā kīanga hou. Tūturu, ko tā te ākongā mahi he tango i ngā kupu ā tētehi atu hei kai mā tōna ake waha.”

Keeping a large sheet of paper available to write the new language as it arises gives both the teacher and students

the opportunity to model the attitude, the process, and the recording method. The practice of recording on the whiteboard is a poor alternative as the board is generally wiped clean at regular intervals meaning that students cannot go back to that information.

The collection of new language can be practised across all curriculum learning areas and be found in all classroom activities.

Recording

Recording (Lewis 2002) new language supports the observing component of the Observe, Hypothesize, Experiment (OHE) model mentioned in the introduction. The challenge for second-language learners is how to transfer input into long-term memory. Recording new language, writing it down, is a step towards entering it into long-term memory. Recording the receptive language will therefore help it to become available as productive language.

Teachers may want to develop notebook routines appropriate to their class level and teach students how to use their notebooks to record. Students need to be clear that their notebook is a personal resource/learning aid that helps them to carry out good practice in language learning. It is not something to be tested once a week, but something used by the learner to support their learning. For example, I was asked to model a guided reading lesson in a Years 3–4 class for the teacher to observe. At the end of the lesson, one student fetched his notebook and wrote down new language he had noticed during the guided reading session. Notebooks may also include lists of lexical chunks to be learned as a precursor to a language lesson. The learner frontloads lexical chunks they plan to use, which they keep on hand during the language task. Teachers of younger learners can use a card system where lexical chunks are recorded by the teacher on personal cards kept in a fabric hanger on the wall, with a pocket for each child.

Lewis (2002, p. 76) maintains that a second-language “notebook needs to be organised in such a way as to make material retrievable”. It follows that it is lexical chunks that need to be recorded along with their purpose and how they say particular things. For example,

“Ka mau te wehi!” Ohorere, kōrero mō te pai ō tētehi mea.

This example records both form and function.

The temptation is often to record it as L2 (second language) word = L1 (first language) word, for example:

mau = grasp

wehi = fear

Or to record a L2 word with a single L2 synonym, for example:

aruaru = whai

Recording one word is less helpful than recording the lexical chunks as it does not record information about the lexical content of that word or contextual meanings.

Reviewing

Reviewing (Lewis, 2002) is the deliberate return to new language by learners to remind themselves of the items which they have collected. Thornbury (2002) relates the reviewing process to retrieval. The reviewing process can function as part of the Hypothesis component of OHE in that the learner makes and reviews the connections to their existing schema knowledge. New language chunks which have been noticed, collected, and recorded can be made retrievable from memory through review and productive use. The following steps all contribute to this outcome.

Lewis (2002, p. 51) suggests that it is “necessary for a word to be met 7 (or more) times to become acquired”. Each time that meeting takes place, in context, the learner understands more about that word.

It is therefore important for a classroom routine to include regular times for review. Lexical chunks collected in previous weeks are reviewed and organised, not just today’s or yesterday’s items. During the review time, I recommend that learners start the wānanga process explained in the section Adding Cognitive Depth which follows.

It is important to acknowledge that the total number of lexical chunks being collected by students at any one time is vast, and beyond the ability of the teacher to monitor. Instead I encourage the teacher to manage the review process by helping learners to acquire sound learning routines, and by creating fun and engaging learning activities that make use of the DALL strategies in active and authentic ways. This might include not only the chunks resulting from direct teaching, but also those chunks collected independently by the learners.

Repeating

Repeating (Thornbury 2002) helps learners to process new language. This is the initial part of the Experiment phase of OHE. Repeating works particularly for formulaic and standard expressions. Often the learner may not be aware of how to adapt a language item to a new situation. So “Ka mau te wehi!” is used as is, and the learner is not yet able to say, “Ka mau te wehi o tāu mahi!”

Maximising the number of revisits to the target phrase or lexical chunk increases understanding and strengthens it in memory for easy access (Lewis 2002, p. 51).

Additionally, it is important to distribute the reviews and repeats over a period of time, after a day, a week, a month, to keep the items in the long-term memory (Lewis, 2002).

Within the classroom environment, it is too time consuming for the teacher to keep track of all of the new

language being collected by each individual. Nor can they control their students' distributed practice. Classroom activities need to provide opportunities for individuals to undertake regular repetition. For example, new language generated around a topic or inquiry can be made into card matching activities and other language games and activities, such as Memory, Flashcards, Talk-about-its, and the like. *The Oral Language Book* (Cameron & Dempsey, 2016) is a good source for ideas.

I encourage teachers to package up activities in resealable clear bags, labelled with the topic and kept in a games corner. I recommend that the classroom programme includes time for all learners to play these games, thereby reviewing and repeating language collected over extended periods. All students can benefit from games time, not just the students who finish early.

Recycling

Recycling—using the target word/phrase in a different context—is a critical step in turning receptive language into productive language. Lewis (2002) supports the notion that it is through “recycling that new language is acquired” (p. 49).

Recycling is the main part of the experimental phase of OHE model, where the learner tries out the new language to carry out a purpose other than the original. So, having collected, recorded, reviewed and repeated, “Mahia tō mahi!” they use the same principle to see if “Waiatatia te waiata” or “Pātaihia te pātai” works. If “Hōake tātou” was collected then they try, “Me hōake koutou ki te hopua kaukau.”

To optimise this strategy I encourage teachers to work with their learners to create an environment where there is increased risk taking, increased peer support, and rewards for experimentation.

Rehearsing

Preparation time is critical in giving the learner confidence and allowing for experimentation. This is the time where the learner constructs what they are going to say prior to saying it. It may be some hours ahead if they are to present a report or perform a karanga, or minutes ahead if they are to give feedback. Van Hees (2007, p. 94) suggests “Think, Prepare, Share” (Whakaarohia, Whakaritea, Kōrerotia) as a suitable strategy in a language-learning classroom environment. This is a variation on the widely practised “Think, Pair, Share.”

Children may need to be taught how to rehearse, the use of flashcards, how to take written notes, how to make and use cue cards, and the usefulness of being prepared.

Adding cognitive depth

According to Thornbury (2002) making decisions about a word/chunk facilitates the memorising of that item.

New language is retained more effectively when the learner makes as many connections to their existing schema as possible. Through the process of wānanga a deeper understanding of the new language is acquired. Thornbury (2002) draws attention to the relationship between the number of decisions made about a word or chunk and the likelihood of it being remembered and retrieved. The deeper those thoughts are the better.

Schema are multiple existing conceptual hooks and existing connections upon which to hang the new material. A word in Māori may be linked to an English word and concept (this is a superficial level), or a “This is how to say...” statement about the purpose or function of the word. It could include associating it with similar words on the same subject, identifying the part of speech and how the item works in a sentence, and so on. The greater the depth at which the lexical chunks are considered the more likely they are to be remembered.

In summary, the deliberate acts of language learning (DALLs) are:

- Noticing
 - Being aware of new language/vocabulary
- Collecting
 - Becoming a collector of language
- Recording
 - Writing down new language/vocabulary as a step in the process of entering it into long-term memory
- Reviewing
 - Regularly and frequently returning to the new language until it becomes fixed in long-term memory
- Repeating
 - Using the target word/phrase again over a period of time... same day, next day, next week, next month
- Recycling
 - Using the target word/phrase in a different context
- Rehearsing
 - Practising the target language to oneself with the intention of using it later
- Adding cognitive depth
 - Thinking about how to use the new word/chunk, what it means, what it links to, what part of speech, how it works. This is a way of incorporating and consolidating the new language in the existing vocabulary and lexical schema.

Ngā mahi takune hei ako reo matatini

- Te aronga
 - Kia aro pū ki ngā reo hou/kupu hou
- Te kohikohinga
 - Kia huri hei kaikohikohi reo
- Te tuhinga
 - Kia tuhia te reo hou hei āwhina i te mau a hinengaro mā ake tonu, kia taea hoki te pānui anō ako ai.
- Te pānui tuaruatanga
 - Kia hoki auau, kia riterite tonu te pānui

- Te tōaitanga
 - Kia kōrerotia te reo hou i taua rā tonu, ā tahirā, ā tērā wiki, ā tērā marama kia mau pūmau ki roto i te kete o mahara.
- Te tukuruatanga
 - Kia kōrerotia te reo hou i roto i te horopaki rerekē
- Te whakaharatau
 - Kia mōhio pū te kaikōrero ki āna e whakaputa ai a muri ake nei.
- Te wānanga
 - Kia wānangahia te reo hou, me tana hononga ki kupu kē, te pūtake me te tino tikanga o taua reo.

Not all of these language-learning stages need to occur in formal lessons or within structured activities. As teachers and students become more familiar with the intent of the routines outlined above, they will also likely become more creative and self-directed in their processes. New language can be noticed, recorded, reviewed, and used in so many different contexts, in ways that feel natural and fun—from waiata and whaikōrero to debating and drama. Students should feel motivated by the sense of achievement in their language learning and inspired to take ownership of when and how they utilise the different strategies to assist them.

Observed outcomes

As previously stated, over the past 6 years the DALLs have been introduced in the classroom programmes of six Auckland Māori-immersion and dual-language units. The initial implementation of DALLs in classrooms appears to be showing success in increasing the metacognition of students. Teachers have reported that their students demonstrate greater curiosity about words and chunks and a greater focus on building personal lexicons (J. Howe & T.M. Lowman, pers. comm., 2017). I have observed similar outcomes in primary-school classrooms and in adult language courses.

Another teacher noted that their students were engaging each other in talk about language chunks and how to express the ideas in the new language. (R. Keegan, pers. comm., 2018)

The example cited earlier of the child recording new material autonomously indicates an increase in a learner's responsibility for the learner's own language learning. Teachers have also commented favourably to me on the clarity they now have around language learning and their ability to give students explicit guidance. Adult learners introduced to DALLs have also expressed enthusiasm and commented on how they feel more empowered as language learners (T.M. Lowman, pers. comm., 2018).

All of the adult students I have taught have maintained their own notebooks. They routinely follow the DALLs during class sessions and their notebooks also include chunks collected from interactions with other language

sources such as other speakers, television, or the internet. More significantly I frequently observe their utterances making use of the recorded material with constant reference to the notebook.

Conclusion

Making explicit the acts of language learning that students can bring to their work leads to more efficient learning. This article brings together, and makes available at the classroom level, theory, research, and practice about the nature of language learning and how target languages can be learned more effectively, with a particular focus on learning te reo Māori.

Whereas previously it has often been assumed by teachers I have worked with that their students already know how to go about additional language learning, the use of DALLs has made explicit the strategies that students need when learning a new language, particularly in immersion settings.

The DALLs approach described in this article has been developed in classroom practice over around six years. So far there has been no formal research into its effectiveness but all indications are that such research would be a valuable addition to current knowledge about language-teaching pedagogy.

Glossary

Reo Māori words and phrases as used in this article.

Aruaru to follow

Ei! Titiro ki tēnei kīanga hou i roto i tā tātou pukapuka!

Ka rawe! Look at this new phrase in our book! Its great!

Hereturikōkā August

He tangata whai mana A person of authority

Hōake tātou Off we go

“Ka mau te wehi!” Ohorere, Kōrero mo te pai o tetehi mea. “Wow! Amazing!” Expressing amazement.

Ka mau te wehi o tāu mahi! Your work is amazing!

Ka pai e tama Good boy

Ka pai Hera, kua kohia e koe ngā kīanga hou. Tūturu, ko tā te ākongā mahi he tango i ngā kupu ā tētehi atu hei kai mā tōna ake waha. Good Hera, you have collected new language. Good language learners take other people's words and use them for themselves.

karanga a formal call of welcome

kete basket

mahia tō mahi do your work

Mahuru September

Me hōake koutou ki te hopua kaukau Off you go to the swimming pool

pātaihia te pātai ask the question

Rapua ētehi atu kīanga hou, ka kōrerotia tahitia ai e tātou Look for some new phrases and let us share them

waiatatia te waiata Sing the song
whai to follow, and a range of meanings as well as follow
whai mai follow me

Note

- 1 Reo Māori words and phrases are glossed at the end of this article.

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