Exploring synergies between Māori pedagogy and communicative language teaching

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Abstract
The primary aim of this paper is to explore potential synergies between Māori pedagogy and what is known as 'communicative language teaching'. A brief outline of some changes and developments in approaches to language teaching and learning over the last few decades is followed by a summary of some of the main characteristics of communicative language teaching (CLT) and of different approaches to the conceptualization of Māori pedagogy. Some of the primary characteristics of communicative language teaching are then explored in the context of Māori pedagogy and it is argued that there are some important synergies between the two.

Introduction
The focus here is on the teaching and learning of Māori language and culture in the context of what has come to be known as 'communicative language teaching' (CLT). This is an approach that is based on a large body of research about learning generally and about language learning in particular. It is an approach that has had an immense impact around the world. Communicative language teaching can be adapted to a vast range of local circumstances and is now recommended by Ministries of Education around the world. It is an approach that can be used in Māori-immersion and in 'mainstream' school settings. It emphasises the importance of cultural respect and understanding and is, it will be argued here, an approach that is, or can be, entirely consistent with concepts of Māori pedagogy.

Brief history of recent developments in language teaching
A very brief account of changes in approaches to language teaching that have taken place in the last fifty years or so is provided here.

Grammar translation and audio-lingual habit theory
Prior to the 1950s, one of the most widespread approaches to the teaching of languages was what is known as 'grammar translation' (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Learners would be given passages from the target language (the language they were learning) and would, with the help of the teacher, translate them into their first language, pausing to discuss vocabulary and structures they were unfamiliar with as they arose. It is hardly surprising, then, that many learners ended up believing that concepts are largely that same in different languages (just labeled differently). Thus, for example, within the context of such an approach, learners of te reo Māori would be likely to think that the words 'kaitiaki' and 'guardian' represent essentially the same concept because these two words would be associated in their minds through translation. It is also hardly surprising that many learners ended up with little genuine concept of cultural difference.

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In the 1950s and 1960s, the study of all aspects of human behaviour was dominated by an approach that is referred to as 'behaviourism', an inductive, data-driven approach that is based on the belief that everything that organisms do can be described scientifically with reference to publicly observable processes (e.g. actions) or privately observable processes (e.g. thinking and feeling) without making reference to internal physiological processes (see, for example, Watson, 1930). People were believed to learn things, including languages, largely through imitation and positive reinforcement (such as praise) (see for example, Skinner, 1957). Associated in the 20th century with behaviourism was structuralism, an approach to the analysis of language, culture and society in which specific areas of human endeavour were treated as internally coherent systems of interrelated parts (Sturrock, 2003). Following de Saussure (1916), structuralist linguists treated language as an internally coherent system of signs that were made up of two parts, a *signifier* (a specific sound pattern or its mental representation) and a *signified* (meaning). Structuralist linguists focused on individual sentences and on the rules that governed these sentences (rather than on, for example, complete texts). In the field of language learning, an approach developed that was related to linguistic structuralism. Referred to as 'audio-lingual habit theory', this approach was based on encouraging language learners to listen to sentences, memorize them and repeat them before practicing the structures involved by retaining the sentence patterns while changing some of the words. This was referred to as 'substitution drilling' (see critique by Rivers, 1964). For example, the initial sentence might be:

She likes eating cake.

Students might then be given words like *muffins, steak, sweets* etc.

They would then create parallel sentences such as:

She likes eating muffins.

They might then practice sentences where *she* was replaced by *he*; *likes* by *hates*, *eating* by *drinking* etc. Of course, only certain substitutions are possible. For example, it is not possible to produce a grammatical sentence by replacing *likes* by *wants*: * He wants eating cakes. So, for sentences containing 'wants', a different substitution drill would be necessary.

There are three problems here. First, the focus tended to be on structure rather than meaning and the sentences that learners produced often had no personal meaning for them. For example, a learner who was encouraged to say "I like eggs" might actually hate them. Second, people do not learn languages simply by listening, memorizing, repeating and doing substitution drills (Ellis, 1985). Third, what little cultural content there was in language teaching tended to be divorced from the language itself and taught (separately generally through the medium of the students' first language) even though language and culture are inextricably related.

Cognitive code learning theory

As Noam Chomsky (1959) pointed out with reference to the acquisition of first languages, children do not learn languages simply by copying. If they did, children whose first language is English would never say things like *I goed to the shops* (not

something they are likely ever to have heard adults saying). In fact, however, children do say things like this. Chomsky argued that children are equipped with what he called a 'learning acquisition device' (LAD). They listen to what people say and then try things out, forming rules that are partially correct and then gradually adjusting them. Errors are therefore an important part of learning. Although Chomsky was not talking about the learning of additional languages, his work eventually led to a change in the teaching of additional languages. This change came about with the introduction of what was referred to as 'cognitive code learning' (Chastain, 1969). The belief here is that learners should *not* be taught rules explicitly but should be given controlled input that conforms to rules and left to work out the rules for themselves by trial and error. It is this approach that underlies (but only in a very broad sense) the work of Stephen Krashen (1981), who argued that the only thing that really matters in language teaching is providing comprehensible input, that is, input that learners understand. In fact, however, there are two major problems here. First, the issue of how you actually get learners to understand input was never adequately addressed. Although it is simple enough to get learners to understand some words by using pictures and gestures and actions, this does not take us very far. Secondly, and more importantly, researchers gradually came to understand that learning a second or additional language is fundamentally different from acquiring a first language. If these two things were the same, all you would need to do is immerse people in a second language (whatever their age) and they would quickly become highly proficient in it.

There is now a vast body of research that suggests that an effective approach, whatever context learners are in (whether 'immersion' or 'mainstream') is an approach based on what is referred to as 'communicative language teaching'.

What is communicative language teaching and where did it come from?

Communicative language teaching is part of an overall communicative movement in language teaching which is itself part of a general movement towards student-centered (as opposed to teacher directed) education that began around the mid 1960s. This general movement towards student-centered or learner-centered education was initially particularly associated, so far as languages are concerned, with the teaching of English as a first language in schools and with a book by John Dixon (published in 1967) called *Growth through English*. That book was a report of an Anglo-American seminar held at Dartmouth College in the USA in 1966. It recommended an approach to the teaching of English in schools that stressed personal growth and creativity. Student-centred approaches became linked to developments in the teaching of additional languages which placed greater emphasis on content, overall textual structuring and the processes involved in written composition (such as brainstorming and drafting). At the core of the communicative movement in the teaching and learning of additional languages is the concept of 'communicative language teaching' which developed out of the concept of 'communicative competence' or 'communicative competencies'.

One of the first formulations of 'communicative competence' was proposed by Hymes (1972). Hymes defined 'communicative competence' in terms of what learners need to know in order to communicate. Hymes included within his definition of communicative competence each of the following: *formal possibility* (whether an utterance is grammatically accurate), *implementational feasibility* (whether an utterance can actually be understood in terms of, for example, its length and

compexity), *contextual appropriacy* (whether an utterance is appropriate in a particular context), and *the performative role of utterances* (the meanings they have by virtue of the context in which they are used). Since Hymes, there have been many different definitions and descriptions of communicative competence and communicative competencies. For example, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1997) divide communicative competence into five major components: *discourse competence, linguistic competence, transactional competence, sociocultural competence* and *strategic competence*. More recently, the Council of Europe (2001, pp. 108-130) has proposed a three part model that divides communicative competence into: *linguistic skills and knowledge, sociolinguistic skills and knowledge* and *pragmatic skills and knowledge* (see also Bachman, 1990). The first of these includes phonology, orthography, vocabulary, morphology and syntax; the second includes rules of politeness, norms governing relationships (e.g., between generations, sexes, classes and social groups) and codification of social rituals; the third includes discourse competence, functional competence and design competence. Clearly, being competent in a language involves a great deal more than being able to create grammatically correct sentences. For one thing, it involves a deeply embedded understanding of culture. How, then, do you teach language learners to develop communicative competence? The development of what is referred to as 'communicative language teaching' came as a response to this question.

There are many accounts of communicative language teaching in the research literature. In fact, there are what is known as 'strong versions' and 'weak versions' (Howatt, 1984, pp. 296-297), the former (generally associated with the early stages of the development of communicative approaches), being based on the assumption that grammar should not be taught, the latter (now by far the most widely accepted) stressing the importance of teaching grammar implicitly in appropriate contexts. The issue is, in fact, no longer *whether* grammar should be taught but *how* it should be taught (Johnson, 2000, pp. 168-169). Littlewood (1981, pp. 6, 77 & 78) defined communicative language teaching in terms of four broad skill domains (*manipulation of the language system*; *ability to relate form and communicative function*; *understanding of the social meanings of linguistic forms*; *strategic control in the use of language to communicate effectively in specific situations*) and three general principles (*the communication principle* - activities that engage genuine communication promote learning; *the task principle* - the extent to which language is used to carry out tasks is regarded as important to language learning; and *the meaningfulness principle* - the learning process is supported to the extent that language is used meaningfully). One of the best known definitions of communicative language teaching is that provided by Nunan (1991, pp. 279-295) which includes:

- emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language;
- introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation;
- provision of opportunities for learners to focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself;
- enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning; and
- attempt to link classroom language learning and language activities outside the classroom.

Communicative language teaching is therefore teaching that encourages learners to engage in meaningful communication in the target language as they learn, communication that has a function over and above that of language learning itself. The communication in which they are involved during the process of language learning should have personal, social and cultural meaning.

Communicative language teaching involves teachers and learners in *using the target language for all or most of the time*, not just when new language is being introduced and practiced. Teachers will generally give instructions in the target language even when they are teaching students whose existing level of competence in that language is low. However, teachers who use the target language for all or most of the time need to be able to *grade their language* very carefully in relation to what learners already know and, of course, use gesture, illustrations etc. very carefully. There is no point in teaching learners to use a relatively simple piece of language and then chatting to them in much more complex language.

Teachers who use communicative approaches do not dominate language lessons. It is the learners who do most of the talking (often in pairs or groups). After all, it is the learners who need to practice using the language, not the teachers.

Translation is generally avoided in communicative language teaching. There are several reasons for this. First, it wastes time. It is the target language that learners need to focus on, not their first language. Secondly, translation interferes with the learning process: learners who constantly switch between languages while learning often have difficulty in becoming fluent in the target language. In addition, although it is possible to provide an accurate translation of some simple concepts, it is not possible to provide an accurate translation of more complex concepts.

Communicative approaches teach vocabulary, grammar and discourse features (e.g. how to link dialogue segments or paragraphs together or how to create coherent texts) *in meaningful contexts and encourage learners to practice using the language in the context of meaningful activities*, such as information gap activities (in which learners ask others for information that they genuinely need in order to complete a task (e.g. preparing an information booklet about a particular area or explaining the rules of a game such as *Mū tōrere*)).[1]

Tutored language/ culture learning is inevitably artificial in some respects. Even so, those who subscribe to the ideals of communicative language teaching aim to keep this artificiality to a minimum. They also try to ensure that learners use the language as often as possible and in contexts in which they can interact with other speakers of the language, particularly native speakers.

Communicative language teaching emphasises *the importance of not being over-ambitious*. Language programmes that are too ambitious, programmes that introduce too much new language too quickly, do not provide learners with a genuine opportunity to learn. They may even undermine the confidence and motivation of learners. Thus, the learning of the target language should not only be *enjoyable, but also purposeful*. It should be *challenging but never overwhelming*.

Do we teach grammar in communicative language classes? The answer is NO - if what we mean by teaching grammar is teaching lots of grammatical rules explicitly and expecting learners to memorise them. However, if teaching grammar means teaching about language forms implicitly, then the answer is certainly YES. Students who are taught communicatively generally learn the grammar of the target language implicitly rather than explicitly. Because communicative language teaching does not involve the memorisation of lots of grammatical rules, an important aspect of an effective language teacher's repertoire is knowing how to teach grammar implicitly in interesting and effective ways.

What about errors? Although accuracy is as important as fluency in many contexts, it is completely unrealistic to expect learners to produce language that is error-free all of the time (see Stern, 1983, p.465). Language learning is a developmental process and making errors is part of that process. For example, learners may find that they can use new language accurately when they first learn it but begin to make errors when they start to use the new language in different contexts and integrate it with their existing knowledge, or they may find that they are able to correct errors themselves when they are writing (and have time to monitor their work) but still continue to make errors in rapid speech. Thus, it is sensible to *treat errors as opportunities for further learning*. On some occasions, teachers may choose not to correct errors so as not to interfere with fluency development; on other occasions, when their focus is on accuracy, they may indicate the location of errors (often just with a gesture) and give learners an opportunity to correct them themselves before they intervene. On those occasions when teachers choose not to correct errors, they will nevertheless wish to note them, making them a focus for teaching at some later date.

Here are some of the things that teachers who teach language communicatively do:

- welcome all learners and treat them all with *respect, courtesy and consideration*;
- try to create a context in which *learning is genuinely enjoyable and in which different needs, interests and learning styles* are accommodated;
- include *as much variety as possible* in the activities they introduce in class;
- *introduce new language in meaningful contexts* and use a range of techniques (generally not including translation) to communicate meaning;
- encourage learners to practice using the target language in contexts in which they need to *communicate for a genuine reason* (for example, to find out information they do not already have);
- *use the target language for most of the time* (adapted to students' level of understanding);
- encourage learners to use the target language as much as possible to *perform tasks in pairs and groups*;
- encourage learners to *learn from one another*;
- introduce new language in a way that is *challenging but never overwhelming*;
- *encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning*, developing strategies (for example, making use of context) to work out the meaning of words they encounter in reading and listening that they do not initially understand;

- encourage learners to seek out opportunities to use the language they are learning outside of the class, especially *opportunities to communicate with native speakers* and more advanced learners;
- introduce a wide range of *authentic materials, activities and text-types*;
- *recognize that language and culture are inseparable* and reflect this in their teaching;
- recognize that *errors are an inevitable part of language learning* and that they can provide a useful basis for further learning.

Learning a target language is multi-faceted. It involves **learning to**:

- understand and use *a wide range of vocabulary, grammar and discourse features* (for example, ways of linking conversational turns and text segments);
- recognise and use *appropriate gestures and body language*;
- develop *awareness of what is culturally appropriate* as well as what is linguistically correct;
- develop *sensitivity to the relationship between language and gender, language and age, language and status, and language and regional and situational context*;
- appreciate *the different ways in which people interact in different contexts,* including different cultural contexts;
- understand and use language that is appropriately selected and organized in different types of *formal and informal text* (including culturally specific text-types);
- understand *the conventions that guide traditional modes of communication as well as contemporary modes of communication* (such as texting and communicating in Internet-based groups).

A very important aspect of communicative language teaching is that it can be adapted in all sorts of ways to suit different teaching and learning contexts. Fundamental to it is, after all, respect for and understanding of people and culture.

Synergies between communicative language teaching and Māori pedagogy

Are there synergies between communicative language teaching and Māori pedagogy? In order to attempt to answer this question, it is important to determine what is meant by Māori pedagogy. Here are two possible interpretations of Māori pedagogy:

1) An approach to teaching and learning that characterized traditional *whare wānanga*.[2]
2) An approach to teaching and learning in which *kaupapa Māori* is central (see, for example, the literature review on *Kaupapa Māori and Māori Education Pedagogy* by Pihama, Smith, Taki & Lee, 2004).

It seems unlikely that there are any genuine synergies between communicative language teaching and the first of these interpretations of Māori pedagogy. In fact, although there were, and are, almost certainly commonalities among groups in the ways in which traditional *whare wānanga* operated (see, for example, Mead, 2003), there were/ are also some differences. Thus, for example, the ways in which *Ngā Puhi*

traditionally taught in *whare wānanga* are almost certainly different in some ways from the ways in which *Waikato* traditionally did. The critical point is that no claim is being made here about any specific synergies between communicative language teaching and the ways in which traditional schools of learning operate except to the extent that the centrality of language and culture and their inextricable relationship are emphasized in both.

There are, however, potential synergies between communicative language teaching and the second conceptualization of *Māori* pedagogy. Tuakana Nepe (1991) notes that *Kaupapa Māori* derives from distinctive cultural, epistemological and metaphysical foundations and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has observed that the concept of *Kaupapa Māori* implies a way of framing and structuring thought. Graham Hingangaroa Smith (1990, p. 100) observes that a *Kaupapa Māori* base presupposes each of the following:

- the validity and legitimacy of *Māori* is taken for granted;
- the survival and revival of *Māori* language and culture is imperative;
- the struggle for autonomy over our own cultural well-being, and over our own lives.

These are three very general presuppositions that cannot have any direct relationship with communicative language teaching itself, particularly when it is borne in mind that *Kaupapa Māori* is a resistance strategy and that communicative language teaching is a global phenomenon whose origins, although it has now spread throughout the world, are particularly associated with Europe. The issue in relation to these three presuppositions is therefore not, and could not be, whether they are consistent with communicative language teaching but whether they are inconsistent with communicative language teaching. At first sight, it might appear to be the case that communicative language teaching, emerging as it does from a global movement and having its origins in Europe, is, in fact, necessarily inconsistent with all three of these presuppositions. In fact, however, a critical aspect of communicative language teaching is its insistence on the inextricable relationship between language and culture and its openness to interpretations that are culturally specific.[3]

Ako is a traditional Māori concept that has been translated as 'Māori pedagogy'. As Pihama et al. (2004) observe, in tradition-based *Māori* society, *ako* was an educative process that was integral to the creation, conceptualisation, transmission and articulation of *Māori* knowledge, one that necessarily emerged out of *Māori* epistemologies, values and constructions of the world. Metge (1985) has glossed 'ako' as 'education through exposure' and has referred to its all-encompassing nature.

What, then, are some of the characteristics of *ako* that suggest potential synergies with communicative language teaching? First, let us remind ourselves of some of the characteristics of communicative language teaching. It is: learner-centered, meaning-centered, activity based, co-operative and collaborative. It emphasizes learning by doing. It stresses the importance of good relationships between teachers and learners and good relationships among learners. It encourages engagement with communities of speakers. It focuses on success, on what learners *can do* rather than on what they cannot yet do. It also places cultural understanding at the very centre of learning.

The characteristics of *ako* include each of the following.

The centrality of *whanaungatanga* and *wairua* (relationships and spirituality). *Aho Matua*, Māori life principles as a working philosophy for all aspects of school life, locates learning firmly within the complex inter-relationships (physical and metaphysical) that constitute *Te Ao Māori* (see, for example, Mead 2003, p. 307; Nepe, 1991). As Walker (1990, p. 63) observes, community is central: "The basic social unit in Māori society was the whanau, an extended family which included three generations. At the head were the kaumatua and kuia, the male and female elders of the group. They were the storehouses of knowledge, the minders and mentors of children". In the words of Nepe (1991, p. 31):

> There are many and varied learner-teacher relationships associated with ako. Everyone has a role to play in a child's education - *kaumātua and kuia* [elders]; *matua and whaea* [parents]; *tuakana* and *teina* [elder and younger siblings of the same gender] *tuahine and tungāne* [siblings]; *tama* and *tamāhine* [children]; *tipuna whaea* and *tipuna matua* [grandparents]. Among the most significant educators are *tipuna* whose task it was to "[transmit] to *mokopuna* knowledge that [would] develop [their] intellect to 'think *Māori*' as well as to nurture the child's *wairua* to 'feel and be Māori'.

This is an area in which there is an important synergy with communicative language teaching, in which the learning of language and the understanding of culture are not separated but are considered to be inextricably linked. Through conforming to cultural norms and expectations in the learning of language, learners begin to appreciate that a language divorced from its cultural roots and associations is essentially meaningless.

There are other significant synergies. Fundamental to *ako* is the role of *kaiako* and *tūāpā* (teacher as facilitator). Also fundamental is the transmission of knowledge and understating through action, observation and exposure to activities and protocols (both physical and spiritual) (Makareti, 1986; Metge, 1985). Communicative language teaching emphasizes the importance of the teacher becoming a facilitator of task-based learning. Within the context of communicative language teaching, learners are involved in a wide range of activities, some of which are designed to inculcate an understanding of culturally appropriate ways of behaving. Therefore community involvement is important. We can readily compare the role of *kaiako* and *tūāpā* in *ako* with that of *teacher as facilitator* in CLT, and that of *akoranga kaupapa whakamahi* with *task based learning.*

Within the context of *ako*, learners learn through exposure to *whakapapa* (genealogy), *whakataukī* (proverbs), *kōrero tāwhito* (old stories*), waiata* (songs), *karakia* (prayers/ incantations), etc. (Te Rangi Hiroa, 1949). Once again, there is an important synergy between *ako* and communicative language teaching. In communicative language teaching, learners are introduced to a wide range of authentic materials and text-types (including culturally specific ones) and are encouraged to develop competence in ways of knowing and expressing that knowledge that are culturally embedded.

Within the context of *ako*, teaching and learning is not a "bits and pieces" process but an "integrated developmental type of philosophy" (Pere as cited in Pihama et al., 2004, p. 68). The overall approach is an holistic one, important aspects of *ako* being

education in values, identity and belonging (Nepe, 1991). Communicative language teaching is learner-centered. The learner is at the very core of communicative language teaching and it is acknowledged that language education is education that necessarily involves every aspect of a learner's being and personal development.

What of the learners' responsibility? *Ako* involves the inculcation of learners into playing an active, participatory role within society (Pihama et al., 2004). Central to communicative language teaching is the concept of learner responsibility. Learners are expected to develop skills as self-directed, lifelong learners as they proceed, developing learning strategies and seeking out sources of information and understanding for themselves.

Conclusion

In its curriculum for the teaching and learning of te reo Māori in mainstream schools, the Ministry of Education recommends that teaching be underpinned by a communicative approach. When it is fully understood what this means in terms of theory and practice, it becomes clear that there are synergies between communicative language teaching and *ako*.

Endnotes

1. A distinctive board game with similar concepts to draughts, Chinese chequers or chess played by our ancestors.

2. The 'whare wānanga' were the sacred traditional learning houses of most tribal areas, each 'whare wānanga' had its own philosophical beliefs, history, genealogy, traditions and teaching practices according to their tribal areas. Entry was restricted to only the chosen ones and in the early days women were prohibited from entry.

3. In connection with this, it is relevant to note that Gattegno's (1978) 'silent way' was very successfully adapted and interpreted in a way that was appropriate for Māori in the late seventies, Katarina Mataira (1980, p. 15) and Ngoi Pēwhairangi introduced the *Te Ataarangi* method (often in the context of tertiary institutions such as polytechnics).

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