

**Suneal Singh Principal**  
**St. Mary's School Palmerston North**  
**Sabbatical 2018**

**My Investigation**

To investigate successful interventions, practices, and strategies that benefit achievement of Māori and Pasifika learners in meeting National Standards.

**Process**

Undertake professional reading with a particular focus on publications from the Ministry of Education.

Meet and talk to principals and other professionals about practices and strategies that benefit Maori and Pacifica learners.

Discuss with schools effective ways of engaging that benefit the achievement of Maori and Pacifica learners.

Implement key findings and ideas at St. Mary's School.

For ease of people who would like to quickly get to the point of my findings, here are some summary bullet points.

Maori and Pasifika people have been an important part of New Zealand's economy over the last sixty plus years and they are a fast growing and integral part of our society. They are over represented in poor education results, poor health statistics and have low incomes generally.

As an education system within that society, we need changes to effect improvements for these significant and important cultural groups.

Strategies that are effective for Maori and Pasifika students will be effective for all students. They are in essence effective teaching and learning strategies – if we want to see improvement and to ensure success they are essential. For Maori and Pasifika students to succeed, schools have to provide a quality education and a culturally responsive environment including:-

- Highly effective teaching across the school with strong inquiry systems that enable teachers to reflect on student achievement, their own teaching and strategies that will improve achievement
- Teachers use strong formative assessment strategies and give specific, targeted and effective feedback.
- Teachers use strong classroom management techniques
- Teachers get to know their Maori and Pacifica students as people as learners and they gain great understanding of the distinct Maori and Pasifika identities , values and language.
- Teachers take time to find out about the families of Maori and Pasifika students.
- Create a positive and supportive school wide environment that has strong consistent expectations that are non-confrontational and use restorative practices.
- Teacher student relationships are positive and that there is a culture of care.
- Teacher are happy and friendly in interactions with all students.
- Use differentiated learning with classes and across the school.
- Make connections with Maori and Pasifika across the curriculum.
- Utilize Maori and Pasifika language and ensure correct pronunciation of Maori and Pasifika names.
- Actively encourage Maori and Pasifika language within classrooms across the school and promote the use of first language by parents when helping the children.
- Utilize Maori and Pasifika language across the curriculum where ever possible with emphasis on the language of learning and higher level concepts that are covered across the curriculum.

- Forge positive and effective relationships with Maori and Pasifika parents that include giving parents the necessary skills to promote their children's learning.
- Make use of distinct culture, language and dance where ever possible within formal and informal school wide settings.
- Actively up skill through professional development Boards of Trustees and school staff about Maori and Pasifika culture so that they get a greater more in depth understanding of their Maori and Pasifika students.
- Ensure that Maori and Pasifika student achievement targets are a priority and that progress is reviewed and monitored regularly over time.
- Engage with students and parents to ensure that their voice is heard at all levels of school organisation.

Teachers and leaders within the school have to demonstrate a commitment to their Maori and Pasifika students using a collective and shared approach based on a premise that

“If they fail we all fail”.

Or these are ...

“all of our students”

If schools can gain an understanding and demonstrate a commitment to Maori and Pasifika values including the importance of Respect, Love, Service, family, reciprocity and spirituality they will be well placed to move student achievement of Maori and Pasifika students forward.

Maori and Pasifika students need to see that their teacher takes care of them, understands them, their language and culture. This takes an ongoing commitment and is a challenge that all schools must take.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of my sabbatical will be to inquire and examine the following questions.

- What initiatives and programmes are being utilized by best practice Primary Schools in New Zealand to be responsive to Maori and Pasifika learners and improve their achievement against National Standards?
- What are the best practices in schools to engage with Maori and Pasifika parents?
- What can be learnt to enhance Maori and Pasifika achievement by utilising the Maori and Pasifika education plan and current research and literature?

### **Rationale and background**

I have been motivated to research these questions for purely selfish reasons in that I am genuinely interested to understand, learn and implement good practice to improve failing Maori and Pasifika students at my school.

ERO has a focus on this and there are many reports about students not meeting targets. I want to improve my understanding and share my findings with all staff at my school to benefit students and their families.

I will be looking for tangible strategies that can be utilised in a diverse primary school setting both at a leadership level and within the classroom. To explore Maori and Pasifika underachievement and to identify the cultural and language barriers which contribute to this. Through this experience I will understand more fully cultural values that are embedded in student learning.

## **Activities undertaken**

My sabbatical research can be broken into four distinct activities, which I have outlined below.

1. Literature Review to investigate the following questions
  - What can be learnt to enhance Maori and Pasifika achievement utilising the two education plans, current research and literature?
  - What initiatives and programmes are being utilised by best practice primary schools in New Zealand to be culturally responsive to Maori and Pasifika learners and to improve their achievement against national Standards?  
I have endeavoured to look at the latest varied research at the time of this sabbatical including a number of web searches.
2. Visit best practice schools to investigate the following questions:
  - What initiatives and programmes are being used to improve student achievement among Maori and Pasifika learners?
  - What are the best practice schools doing to engage the parents of Maori and Pasifika learners?

This has included visits to schools in Auckland and Christchurch to interview principals and look at best practice.

3. Collecting Local Maori and Pasifika parents and student voice.
  - To deepen my understanding of Maori and Pasifika learners at St. Mary's School in relation to their culture, language and identity
  - What can we do better in terms of engaging with parents to hear their views and to help their child succeed?

Formal and informal "conversations" with parents were carried out at homes, in my office and on the schools and sports fields.

## **Curriculum and Policy Documents**

"Encourage and support!

And raise it to its highest level!

Ensure that high achievement is maintained

Hold fast to our Māori potential

Our cultural advantage

And our inherent capability

Nurture our young generation

The leaders of the future Behold,

we move onwards and upwards!

Two key aspects that shone through were

Quality provision, leadership, teaching and learning, supported by effective governance.

Strong engagement and contribution from parents, whānau, hapū, iwi, Māori organisations, communities and businesses.

Quality teaching is the most important influence that the education system can have on student achievement. Effective teaching and learning depends on the relationship between the teacher and student, and the teacher’s ability to engage and motivate the students.

Ako is a dynamic form of learning. Ako describes a teaching and learning relationship where the educator is also learning from the student in a two-way process and where educators’ practices are informed by the latest research and are both deliberate and reflective.<sup>4</sup> Ako is grounded in the principle of reciprocity and also recognises that students and their whānau cannot be separated. For those working in government, ako is about seeking the perspectives of Māori students, parents, whānau, hapū, iwi and Māori organisations when we do our work. This is an important way to ensure policies and activities take account of identity, language, culture, and what Māori know and value.

There is a strong link between well-being and achievement. Students’ well-being is strongly influenced by a clear sense of identity, and access and exposure to their own language and culture. Students do better in education when what and how they learn reflects and positively reinforces where they come from, what they value and what they already know. Learning needs to connect with students’ existing knowledge.

Identity, language and culture are an asset and a foundation of knowledge on which to build and celebrate learning and success.

A productive partnership in education means a two-way relationship leading to and generating shared action, outcomes and solutions. Productive partnerships are based on mutual respect, understanding and shared aspirations. They are formed by acknowledging, understanding and celebrating similarities and differences.

The Pasifika Education Plan 2013–2017 (PEP) personalises all of the Ministry of Education and Education Partner Agencies’ work to Pasifika. Personalising is used to show that the PEP puts Pasifika learners, their parents, families and communities at the centre, so that all activities ensure the Ministry of Education and Education Partner Agencies are responding to the identities, languages and cultures of each Pasifika group.

This requires the PEP to take account of processes, methodologies, theories and knowledges that are fa’asamoa (the Samoan way), faka-Tonga (the Tongan way), fakaTokelau (the Tokelau way), faka-Niue (the Niue way), akano’anga Kūki ‘Āirani (the Cook Islands way), and vaka-Viti (the Fijian way), for the major Pasifika populations.

Pasifika Success will be characterised by demanding, vibrant, dynamic, successful Pasifika learners, secure and confident in their identities, languages and cultures, navigating through all curriculum areas such as the arts, sciences, technology, social sciences and mathematics.

Data and information will be used to increase the knowledge and voice of Pasifika learners, parents, families and communities, so they can demand better outcomes and influence the education system from within.

<p>1. Pasifika learners excel in literacy and numeracy and make effective study choices that lead to worthwhile qualifications. 2. Pasifika school leavers are academically and socially equipped to achieve their goals for further education, training and/or employment. 3. Pasifika parents, families and communities engage with schools in supporting their children’s learning.</p>	<p>85 percent of year 1-10 Pasifika learners will meet literacy and numeracy expectations, including achieving at or above in National Standards across years 1-8, in 2017.</p> <p>The rate of Pasifika suspensions to reduce from the July 2011 level of 5.4/1000 to 3.6/1000 in 2017, expulsions to reduce from 3.3/1000 to 1.5/1000 in 2017 and the Pasifika exclusion rate to reduce from 2.2/1000 to 1.3/1000 in 2017.</p> <p>The number of all Pasifika school leavers leaving with NCEA Level 1</p>	<p>Implement focused programmes and activities in targeted secondary and primary schools with high Pasifika rolls to increase and accelerate Pasifika achievement.</p> <p>Use Professional Learning and Development to upskill educators in what works for Pasifika learners. Provide alternative learning opportunities and pathways that support Pasifika learners to succeed and provide tools to increase the capability of schools to deliver for Pasifika learners.</p>
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	<p>literacy and numeracy qualifications to increase from 80 percent in 2010 to 95 percent in 2017. 85 percent of Pasifika 18 year olds to achieve NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualifications in 2017.</p> <p>Increase the number of Pasifika school leavers with University Entrance to achieve at least parity with non-Pasifika school leavers in 2017. 80 percent of schools demonstrate fully inclusive practices by 2014 and the remaining 20 percent of schools demonstrate some inclusive practices by 2014.</p> <p>This will see every Pasifika child with special education needs welcomed, participating, enjoying and achieving at any New Zealand school.</p>	<p>Improve the provision of information to PFC about National Standards, NCEA, ERO reports, Youth Guarantee and vocational planning for further education and/or employment.</p> <p>Provide secondary school learners with choice, flexibility and clear pathways leading to tertiary qualifications and/or employment and also provide Pasifika learners with a wider range of education opportunities to achieve NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualifications at senior secondary and foundation tertiary levels.</p> <p>Fully implement the Youth Guarantee programme and support effective transitions to further education, training and employment. Strengthen accountability processes. For example goals and targets for Pasifika learners in school charters and ERO will review schools' performance on programmes targeting Pasifika learners, implementation of the PEP and Pasifika learner achievement.</p> <p>Implement programmes and interventions to increase presence, participation and achievement of Pasifika learners with special education needs, and accelerate implementation of Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) and the Incredible Years Teacher initiative.</p> <p>Provide language and learning intervention to support a smooth transition to school for learners coming from Pasifika immersion early childhood centres, and particularly Pasifika learners that have not participated in early childhood education.</p> <p>Use engagement initiatives such as the Pasifika School Community Liaison Project to engage with parents, families, communities and schools. Increase the Pasifika</p>
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### **Effective Strategies that work for Maori and Pasifika Students**

So what works for Maori and Pacifica students at our schools? If we as leaders and teachers want to make real change and improvements for our Maori and Pasifika students, what does the research say?

The following is a summary of the main points of research readings.

#### **A Focus on Quality Teaching**

There is no magic bullet that will ensure success. Quality teaching and an alignment across a school of high quality research based practice will make an impact on underachieving students. Our underachieving Maori and Pasifika students need the quality of the best practitioner at school.

ERO (2012) “Highly effective schools had systems in place that made inquiry a part of classroom practice, created a culture where there was alignment of practice focussed on improved student achievement”.

School leadership needs to ensure that all their endeavours are focussed around the high level dimensions of the best evidence synthesis research documents and that their school is focused on improving teacher practice. Day to day systems in school needs to encourage teachers to look at their own practice and where teachers and leaders regularly look at and reflect on the following questions at the simplest level-

What are our students learning needs?

What skills do I need as a teacher?

What is the appropriate learning task?

Are my students making progress?

Are there groups of students who my teaching is not catering for?

For powerful shifts to occur these discussions need to happen across the school where there is a philosophy that these are our students and we work collectively to seek and ensure improvement. Schools which create conditions to do this do so in a shared way, creating a strong sense of collective responsibility for student achievement will achieve more success (Robinson et al, 2009). Professional Development needs to be targeted with an emphasis on improved student achievement.

School practice across the schools needs to be aligned so that high quality teaching extends across the school and is not only evident in some parts of the school. This will ensure that success follows students from one class to the next. Students need to have a safe orderly and supported environment where they know what to expect, are encouraged and feel valued. Evidence shows that schools with the greatest coherent practice show the best improvement in the progress of their students.

ERO (2012) found that a minority of schools had initiated programmes aimed explicitly improving Maori and Pasifika student achievement outcomes. These programmes included increasing teachers’ and or BOT knowledge of cultures, setting high achievement expectations, reinforcing effective teacher strategies and making extra provision for English and or Pacific language programmes.

In a study of the views of Pacific Island students and their families and communities, Fletcher et al. (2008, 2009) concluded that a number of practices are conducive to the learning of Pasifika students.

1. Culturally responsive and culturally inclusive, such as students expressed the desire for resources that reflected their own culture.
2. Pacific Island students writing their own cultural experiences within their lives – such as prior knowledge.
3. Regular, quality feedback and feed forward which was specific and transparent.

4. Teacher awareness of bullying/racism and the need for it to be removed from in and out of the classroom.
5. Good class management.
6. The importance of employing a Pasifika liaison person to bridge language gaps.

Quality teaching is essentially important for Maori and Pacifica students. The need well organised and structured activities that are appropriate and cognitively challenging. Teachers need to use formative strategies to demonstrate to students what success looks like.

### **Recognising and valuing the identity of Maori and Pasifika Students**

Alton Lee (2003) states that “effective teaching requires teachers to take responsibility for every student’s achievement, to value diversity, have high expectations and build on students experiences. This requires teaches to understand their day to day experiences, their cultural background and the dimensions that make this up including language and cultural values.”

A school’s curriculum should reflect the cultures of students. This would involve students writing about their own home experiences, songs and dances and to utilise their home language.

Ringold (2005) states “in an effort to be culturally responsive, teachers need to be wary of their own preconceived beliefs about cultural stereotypes that can have an adverse effect on students by limiting their learning opportunities.”

Teachers need to find out about their students cultures and provide a wide range of challenging activities to advance their learning.

Teachers must attempt to broaden their understanding of the home life of these students and the role of family, church and cultural beliefs. An understanding of their parent’s worlds is also important.

Schools need to give staff an opportunity to understand the world of these learners and their cultures. A better understanding will have a positive impact on learning and outcome for these children and families.

### **Using ESOL Principles throughout teaching**

Being bilingual is not an impediment to academic achievement.

Children who are strong in their first language are more likely to succeed in their acquisition of English. Teachers need to acknowledge the many languages that make up their class. Effective teachers will utilise scaffolds so that English language learners are learning the specific vocabulary required to learn the topics and concepts they are studying. The teachers will understand the distinct needs of the student and make explicit the outcomes required to move their learning forward.

### **Positive Student Teacher relationships**

A positive respectful relation between teacher and student is essential for success. All students respond well to teachers who care about the success of their students, believe in them and have high expectation of them.

The most effective teachers had the above and students interviewed said that these were important and had to be in place for success to occur.

More successful teachers had higher levels of self-efficacy or a belief that they can invoke change and improve performance. The cited numerous things that teachers should do to be effective including understanding the worlds of children, having a culture of mutual respect and creating a positive class room environment.

The governments PB4L programme emphasises creating a supportive school wide learning environment. It incorporates many actions that would enhance positive student teacher relationships across a school.

## High Level Engagement with Parents

Research shows that a positive relationship involving engagement with parents within a school has a positive effect on children's academic success.

Alon Lee (2003), Biddulph (2003), Robinson et al. (2009) all put strong emphasis on the importance of building strong reciprocal, responsive relationships with families especially when the staff of the school is not of the same ethnicity as these families. Goal three (Schooling) of the Pasifika Education Plan focusses on the effective engagement of Pasifika families.

For home school partnerships to be successful they need to be:

- Collaborative and mutually respectful and have positive teacher attitudes towards parents.
- Successful home school partnerships are multi-dimensional and responsive to community needs.
- Successful home – school partnerships are embedded in school development plans; they are well resourced; and they are reviewed regularly.
- Successful home school partnerships are goal orientated and focussed on improving student outcomes.
- Effective parental engagement happens largely at home, for example parents do things at home that support the school.
- There is timely two way communication between school and parents in successful home school partnerships.

## Visit to Best Practice schools

What initiatives are being used by Best Practice Schools in New Zealand to be culturally responsive to Maori and Pasifika learners and to improve their achievement?

What are the Best Practice Schools doing to engage parents are thereby improve overall achievement for Maori and Pasifika students?

I visited four schools identified through recommendations by colleagues, who were running programmes within their schools to accelerate progress in Maori and Pasifika students. The size of these schools ranged from between less than 100 to over 550 pupils and they ranged in decile from 1 to 6. One was in Christchurch, two in Auckland and one in Northland.

All schools made some use of the education plans and had annual plans that targeted Maori and Pasifika students, collected student achievement data, shared it with their BOTs and utilised it to make decisions about their teaching and learning programmes. They all allocated resourcing and had a review timeline in place.

I asked a range of questions about teaching and learning at their schools in general and some specific questions about the achievement of Maori and Pasifika students and how they catered to their needs.

When asked

### **“What does effective teaching and learning look like in their schools?”**

I received a range of answers. These included:

- “Positive enthusiastic teachers knowing their students, providing learning based on the needs of their students.”
- “Students achieving and making progress”.
- “Strong relationships between teachers and learners- with learners having clarity about what they are learning, children learning at their own level, high expectations from teachers.”
- “Engaged learners.”
- “Strong formative practices- students knowing what they are learning about and why.”

- Consistency of teacher practice across the school, correlation between action and professional development.”

**“Identify what practices principals would want to see in each class at their school?”**

- “Clear learning intentions, specific learning for each learner, clear teacher student relationships”
- “Small group learning in numeracy and literacy for a minimum of 3 hours a day”
- “Modern learning environments, individual learning tools, lots of scaffolding and questions to encourage thinking.”
- “Grouping, high expectations.”
- “Opportunity for students to talk and share, discuss and think. Different activities occurring.”

It was clear that all principals had high expectations and clear ideas of what the teacher practice would be in each room including how the curriculum would be taught and how long. There was an emphasis on grouping and target specific teaching based on the needs of the students.

**Which strategies and practice do Principals believe are most important?**

- “Respect, care, relationships”
- “Strong relationships, Knowing how far you they can be pushed, know about their family, showing that you value their culture and language”
- “Consistency of practice, critical to ESOL, shared instructional language, planning a needs based programme.”
- “Relationships- respond to clear boundaries and set routines”
- “Importance of keeping the first language strong”

There was clear understanding for the need to have positive relationships. This included having empathy for and understanding the culture and language but also knowledge of learning needs. Some Principals indicated a further emphasis on high quality, shared and consistency practice that focussed on the distinct language needs of the learners.

I followed this with the next series of questions.

**“Do you utilise any specific contexts in your teaching and learning programmes? How do you value the language and culture of Maori and Pasifika students?”**

“Utilise culture at school events especially at the start and end of the year.”

Use it all the time throughout learning and through learning contexts”

“Utilise staff with Maori Pasifika links to help make word banks for different topics”

“While our staff can’t know languages they can recognise values and beliefs of these cultures and attempt to use basic language and words.”

“Cultural groups, celebrations throughout the year”

“Use students to share language”

**“How do you attempt to make connections with your Maori and Pasifika students?”**

Talk to them”

- “Using student centred inquiry process, allow them to write and share about their own culture and experiences”

“Having a Samoan learning group that works with a Samoan teacher aide and is able to discuss their learning in Samoan (first language)”

“By having cultural events with neighbouring schools”

“By using small group instruction well and scaffolded prompts that encourage students to speak and think, for example, I think that means...”

“Having targeted school and class events especially at the start of the year that are designed to have the teacher get to know the students better as people and learners.”

### **How do you attempt to engage your Pasifika parents and what works?**

“Shoulder tapping”

“Large turn out to student conferences, parent interviews etc.”

“To plan events where their children are performing”

“At the Gate”

“We have put a unit holder to look at parental engagement specifically with our Pasifika parents”

“Parent surveys”

“Coffee Groups but they no longer work”

### **Summary of interview with Principals**

All of these schools had strong leadership with a clear sense of direction, vision and values with annual targets looking to improve the progress of their students. The schools with a high number of Pasifika students made the most use of Pasifika language and culture across the curriculum. The schools with the highest numbers of Pasifika students were the lowest decile schools and the Principals of these schools in particular saw a strong need for consistent quality teaching that was aligned across the curriculum. They saw that the single biggest factor to improve Pasifika achievement was high quality teaching that was engaging and that there was a positive relationship between the teachers and the students. They saw that Pasifika students in general need structured learning, which is based on the individual’s interests and needs.

The schools acknowledge the need to have understanding of their Pasifika cultures, language, identify and beliefs. They realised that teachers and themselves could not be Samoan for the Samoan, Tongan for the Tongans etc. There was a sound understanding and motivation, however, to show empathy and understanding about all of their children and their cultures including utilising resources that recognised their culture.

All the schools had strong links with the Pasifika community. All saw the need for engaging the parents and education being a partnership. In the schools with large numbers of Pasifika students they found that Pasifika parents were engaging really well in child centred activities such as student conferences, performances and celebrations of learning. They were however struggling with deliberate consultation activities.

Innovative and successful strategies that were working were:

- Consistent teaching practice across the school in numeracy and literacy with a focus on small groups with an explicit vocabulary focus.
- School wide topics that focus on the cultures and families of the school and that provide opportunities to share their culture.
- School wide activities that promoted families to come into the school.
- Parent education sessions like reading together that focus on changing and improving home/school links to improve academic performance.
- A focus on high quality ESOL strategies across the curriculum that focus on the academic vocabulary while promoting the home language of our Pasifika students.
- A deliberate teacher as inquiry process across the school that focused on a shared ownership of student achievement (these are our students) and improvement of teaching practice based on the needs of the students.

## **INTERVIEW WITH PASIFIKA PARENTS FROM ST. MARYS SCHOOL**

My own school is St. Mary's ([www.stmaryspn.school.nz](http://www.stmaryspn.school.nz)).

We are a school with a current roll of around 200 students. Our roll over the last two years since the earthquakes has been very transient. We have always had a large proportion of Pasifika students at our school and currently the Pasifika population of our school is made up as follows:

- 26 Samoan students 14% of the school population
- 13 Tongan students 7% of the school population
- 9 Fijian students 5% of the school population
- 4 Tuvaluan students 2% of the school population

In an effort to increase my knowledge of our Pasifika students and parents views and opinions I conducted interviews with a group of 12 of our oldest Pasifika students, and a group of parents from six of our Pasifika families.

The questions I utilised were taken from literature that I had read and were adapted as the interviews took place. The meeting with the children was conducted in small groups of four students with me. The parent meeting was run as an informal fono (word for meetings great and small) with one of the parents helping me with translation when necessary. It started with a welcome, prayer and then introduction from all of the parents who were there.

This in itself was extremely enlightening and gave me a large amount of information about the families such as the cultural makeup, how long they had lived in New Zealand, and the journey that they had in coming to New Zealand. It set the tone well for the meeting.

### **What dreams do you have for your child's education?**

This was an excellent question to start with. All of the parents had incredibly high expectations for their children and wanted them to do well at school as they saw this as increasing their children's options and opportunities for the future. They saw education as the key to their success. They wanted their children to remain strong in their language and culture while acknowledging the fact that their children for the most part were living in a different cultural world that most of the parents had grown up in. Some direct quotes were:

- "Dream that they can progress well in the classroom and outside in the world"
- "That their children will do better and achieve more than themselves"
- "That they will be happy, that their culture will not be compromised"

- “That the children will be proud of their culture, have excellent communication skills, that they feel comfortable within themselves to become better people”
- “To be friendly, respectful, love other kids”
- “Respect others especially teachers, be better learners, better than me, have better futures”
- “To continue to be strong with their language”
- “Strive for excellence enjoy what they do, be successful as a Samoan, graduate, get a good job”

### **What are your expectations of our school?**

The opinions on this question were again very succinct and clear. All of the parents realised that for their children to get ahead they needed high quality teaching from teachers who cared about their children. There was a sense that the teacher needed to understand and know about their children and like their children for them to achieve. Once again the expectations from the parents were very high. They want their children to have high quality teaching, their language and culture to be valued and utilised where possible, and for teachers to care for and understand their children. Some of the quotes are below:

- “That our children will be loved by their teachers and that their culture, identity and language will be valued.”
- “That the school will perform well compared to other primary schools”
- “That all children will make good progress”
- “That the school will have high expectations for all children”
- “That our language will be incorporated into learning”
- “That we will get regular feedback about our children. If we need to do something or can help, that we are spoken to before the interviews either by phone or letters”

### **What are the biggest worries, fears you have for your children?**

There was a big link to education achievement in this answer. All of the parent’s biggest fear was that their children would fail at school that would ultimately limit their options for the future. There was an underlying fear of the children losing some or all of their language and cultural identity. Some of the quotes are below:

- “ Failing at school and not having options - if they fail school they fail everything”
- “Not finishing school”
- “Ending up a street kid”
- “Losing their language and identity”
- “For my son to be bullied”

### **What sort of things might you suggest that would enable us at St. Mary’s School to help your children achieve?**

The answer to this question was very interesting as the parents identified the need for teachers to get to know the learners and there was also the point made not to make assumptions about the culture of the children influencing or restricting what the teachers expected of the child. There was still the point of ensuring that the child’s language and cultural identity is valued. There were worries about how they could help at home and genuine concerns about not being able to help with homework. The issue of regular feedback came up as the parents wanted to know how their children were doing, what they could do to help and what more could be done to help their children. Some of the direct quotes are as follows:

- “Get to know the children as individuals, find out about our families, language and culture”
- “Be careful not to stereotype our children based on beliefs about their culture, some of them are quiet and shy, others are boisterous and extraverts”
- “Use some of our language as part of the teaching - our children are a resource”
- “Regularly feedback to us about what we can do to help”
- “Help us understand what we can do to help our children”
- “Utilise some of the repetition and things we do in our culture within the teaching”

- “Help us with homework to understand what we need to do to help at home”

### **What do you think we could do as a school to value your child’s culture?**

The parents acknowledged the challenge facing schools and teachers in multicultural environments having to have an understanding of the languages and cultural backgrounds of the diverse students within the school and the classrooms. Discussions however showed that they believe that in very simple ways their language and culture could be acknowledged such as in a recently completed topic on space a class vocabulary list could be made up with the Pasifika names for the academic language needed. This could be completed at home and school. There was also an acknowledgement of the great work that the school is currently doing on simple things like pronunciation of names etc.

- “Utilise some of our language in teaching and music”
- “Having the children write about their culture”
- “Knowing our children as people and learners”
- “Use the language when you are learning about topics”
- “Understand more about our culture”
- “Continue to pronounce names correctly and utilise the language when possible”
- “Continue to have events that celebrate our culture”

### **Summary**

This was one of the most rewarding focus group consultations that I have ever taken part in. One of the factors contributing to the discussion being so rewarding was that I had had time to look at research, which focused the questions and discussion. The format was good with six families all getting to know each other. They were all of Samoan or part Samoan background so they were able to converse with each other in their first language. They were extremely comfortable expressing themselves. My final summary is below;

- The parents had expectations of their children and the school specifically acknowledging the importance of high quality teaching.
- They believe that teachers need to understand and know about their children as individuals including their language and culture.
- They don’t want their children to lose their culture and language and believe that the school needs to embrace it and utilise it to their advantage.
- They all want their children to show respect, humility and love.
- They are wary of teachers clustering their children into one group believing that they all are individuals who are different.

## **INTERVIEW WITH PASIFIKA STUDENTS FROM ST. MARYS SCHOOL**

### **What do you like about our school and our teaching?**

The results of this question were very encouraging with all of the children identifying that there was a positive culture in the school where they felt safe and that the teachers encouraged them to do well. They mentioned that teachers cared about them and motivated them to achieve. They mentioned that they perceived the school as being fun. Some of the comments included

- “Fun school -encourages children to do their best”
- “Helps us to increase our knowledge and skills”
- “They motivate us”
- “Enjoy school and everything about it”
- “Teachers are kind and they support the children - they encourage us and are kind”
- “They treat everyone the same”
- “They make learning fun - creative”

- “Like the leadership opportunities in Business Brains and Club Captains.”

### **What could we do better?**

The answers to this section while still very positive focused on one specific point of feedback the need to have more exciting and broader range of topics and options. When I delved deeper into this the students, a lot of whom were in Year 8, were getting excited about moving on to high school and moving from room to room doing distinct subjects like science. It made me ponder the curriculum that we are currently running with term long topics based around an inquiry process. Although this allows for deeper learning and in depth use of the learning process there is a trade off with coverage and the range of real science etc. that can be taught. Perhaps this could be the subject of a further review for **ST. MARYS SCHOOL ?**

Some of the comments were:

- “More exciting topics”
- “More subjects like science”
- “More sports”
- “Learn more languages”

### **What do you find the hardest subject?**

There was no distinct pattern to the answer of this subject other than the subject of Maths. All of the children had different areas of strength and weaknesses, as you would expect. There was an underlying theme of Maths that when one person said it the others all agreed. When asked further about this there was an agreement that at the Year 7 and 8 level the maths was getting increasingly complex and that there was some language issues within Maths that some of the students were struggling with.

### **Do you feel that your culture is valued at our school?**

There were comments in two distinct groups to this question. Some of the children said yes and spoke about a Samoan reading group that the teacher had initiated last year, and the teaching of Samoan language as one of the language options. There was also a comment that there had been a lot of reading based around Samoa in school journal reading activities that the children had enjoyed, although this had dropped off recently. Then from a group of Tongan students who were in these groups, there was feeling that their culture and language was not given as much attention as the Samoan students. This comment made me realise the challenging job we have as teachers and educators, as a move in the right direction can cause a level of problem in another area.

### **Is there anything we could do better in terms of valuing your language and culture?**

This question gave me a huge amount to ponder and think about and made me realise that these children and their cultures are a huge largely untapped resource that we need to make further use of within the school. There was a lot of exciting feedback which included:

- More focus on the Pasifika language in day to day teaching for instance finding Pasifika language definitions for topic based vocabulary, and in general classroom teaching using the language of the children in that room whenever possible.
- Trying to allow students to perform Pasifika dances, songs and games more regularly.
- Having a Pasifika option run by our Club Captains as part of our weekly options programme.
- Reading more Samoan, Fijian, and Tongan material in reading groups.
- Ask about our cultures.
- Learn about our language.

## **What are the qualities of a good teacher?**

Once again this was a very interesting question as the answer almost parallels the research on what quality teaching looks like but in student's language. The students were able to identify that quality teachers need to have high expectations, know the learners, know their subject, be well organised and generally create a safe and positive culture with positive relationships.

- "Well organised"
- "Knows their subjects"
- "Encourages us and believes in us"
- "They are happy and good"
- "Makes learning fun and easy to understand"
- "Know about our cultures"
- "Supports the students"
- "Kind - treats everyone the same"

## **Summary**

The answers to the questions were very insightful and reinforced the challenges that we have as educators to accommodate and give due diligence to the many cultures we have in our classrooms. These comments have made me reflect on the practice in our school and how we can best shape our curriculum to reflect and acknowledge the many Pasifika cultures we have at our school.

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