

# **“Improving Engagement and Achievement for Pasifika Learners in Diverse Primary School Settings”**

‘Tu’utu’u le upega ile loloto - Cast the net into deeper waters’

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Sabbatical time: Term 2, 2013

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge the NZEI and Ministry of Education for offering the sabbatical. It has given me the chance to investigate research and issues around Pasifika achievement in an in-depth way that was not possible when running a busy school. It has also given me an opportunity to travel with my family creating memories that I will treasure forever. Thank you to the Riccarton Board for supporting my application and to Andrew Wilkinson for leading the school so well in my absence. To the Riccarton staff, thank you for your continued positive work for the children of Riccarton Primary School.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the senior Pasifika students from Riccarton Primary School as part of this research. Your comments and excitement at being interviewed was great. Coupled with this I had some fantastic meetings interviewing and reporting back to a small group of our Pasifika parents - thank you so much.

I would like to acknowledge the Principals who gave up their time to allow me to interview them about their schools - you are all doing an amazing job.

To Tufulasi Taleni from UC Education Plus, fa’afetai, for your knowledge and support through this process and for leading the Malaga to Samoa.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The achievement of Pasifika students in New Zealand schools has been a concern for a long time. They are not achieving as well as non-Pasifika students. As well as this the Pasifika people who are living in New Zealand (around 8% of our total population) are over represented at the bottom end of a wide range of social economic indicators. The Pasifika population in New Zealand is young and fast growing.

In response the Ministry of Education has introduced the Pasifika Education Plan, which targets goals and action plans that looks to improve the achievement of Pasifika students. However the Education Review Office Report (ERO) on Improving Pasifika Achievement (2012) noted serious issues with individual school responses to their Pasifika student's achievement.

This report looks to investigate strategies that can improve Pasifika achievement through a summary of research literature and resources. It will include interview summaries of Principals, Pasifika parents and students from my school. It will also summarise my study trip to Samoa. For ease of people who would like to quickly get to the point of my findings, here are some summary bullet points:

- Pasifika people have been an important part of New Zealand society and economy over the last sixty years and they are a fast growing group of our society. They are over represented in poor education results, poor health statistics and have low median incomes.
- As an education system within that society, we need changes to effect improvements for this significant and important cultural group.

Strategies that are effective for Pasifika students will be effective for all students. They are in essence effective teaching strategies - if we want to move Pasifika students forward with their learning they are essential. For Pasifika students to experience success, schools need to ensure that they have a quality, culturally responsive environment including:

- Highly effective consistent teaching across the school, with strong teacher as 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 effective feedback.
- Teachers use strong classroom management techniques.
- Teachers get to know their Pasifika students as people and learners and that they gain a greater understanding of the distinct Pasifika identities, values, culture and language.
- Teachers take the time to find out about the families of their Pasifika students.
- Create a positive and supportive school wide environment that has strong consistent behavioral expectations that are non-confrontational and use restorative practices.

- Teacher student relationships are positive and that there is a culture of care.
- Teachers are happy and friendly in interactions with all students.
- Use differentiated learning within classes and across the school.
- Make connections for Pasifika students across the curriculum.
- Utilise Pasifika language and ensure correct pronunciation of Pasifika names.
- Actively encourage Pasifika language within classrooms across the school and promote the use of first language by parents when helping children.
- Utilise 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 Pasifika parents that include programmes that will give Pasifika parents the necessary skills to promote their children’s learning.
- Make use of the distinct Pasifika culture, language and dance wherever possible within formal and informal school wide settings.
- Actively up-skill through professional development Boards of Trustees and school staff about Pasifika culture so that they get a greater more in-depth understanding of their Pasifika students.
- Ensure that Pasifika student achievement targets are a priority and that progress is reviewed and monitored regularly over time.
- Engage with Pasifika students and parents to ensure that their voice is heard at all levels of school organization.

Teachers and leaders within school have to demonstrate a commitment to their Pasifika students using a collective and shared approach based on the 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 the Pasifika values including the importance of Respect, Love, Service, Family, Reciprocity and Spirituality they will be well placed to move the student achievement of Pasifika students forward.

Pasifika students need to see that their teacher cares for them, understands them, their identity, language and culture. This takes an ongoing commitment and is a challenge that all schools with Pasifika students must take.

## **PURPOSE**

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

- What initiatives and programmes are being utilised by best practice Primary Schools in New Zealand to be culturally responsive to Pasifika learners and to improve Pasifika achievement?
- What are best practice schools doing in terms of engaging with Pasifika parents?
- What can be learnt to enhance Pasifika achievement by utilising the Pasifika education plan and current research and literature?
- To deepen my understanding of Pasifika learners in New Zealand schools particularly in relation to their culture, language and identity. There will be a particular focus on the Samoan community of my school.

## RATIONALE AND BACKGROUND

I have been motivated to research these questions following the Education Review Office publication of the national evaluation report looking at how primary and secondary schools engage with Pasifika learners and work to lift their achievement entitled Improving Educational Outcomes for Pacific Learners 2012.<sup>1</sup> The report is based on information gathered from 302 schools from a range of deciles, roll sizes and locations across the country. It considers:

- Schools' achievement and assessment practices for Pasifika students
- Schools' awareness and use of the Pasifika Education Plan (PEP)
- School initiatives to promote Pasifika student engagement in learning
- Boards of trustees' knowledge about Pasifika students
- Schools' work with parents and families.

The report finds that school leaders and teachers in schools are not recognising and actively responding to the achievement disparity of Pasifika students, are not creating curriculum contexts that provide opportunities for Pasifika students to make connections with their identity, culture and heritage and are not actively engaging their Pasifika parents in meaningful ways that will enhance Pasifika achievement.

My sabbatical will attempt to explore what we as school leaders and teachers can do better in terms of being culturally responsive to Pasifika learners with regard to school leadership and pedagogy.

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

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Improving-Education-Outcomes-for-Pacific-Learners-May-2012/Introduction/The-Pasifika-Education-Plan-2009-2012>

## ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN

My sabbatical research can be broken into 4 distinct activities, which I have outlined below.

### 1. Literature Review to investigate the following questions:

- What can be learnt to enhance Pasifika achievement by utilising the Pasifika education plan and current research and literature?
- What initiatives and programmes are being utilised by best practice Primary Schools in New Zealand to be culturally responsive to Pasifika learners and to improve Pasifika achievement?

I have endeavored to look at the latest and wide variety of research that the time of this sabbatical has allowed me, including a number of web searches.

### 2. Visits to best practice schools to investigate the following questions:

- What initiatives and programmes are being utilised by best practice Primary Schools in New Zealand to be culturally responsive to Pasifika learners and to improve Pasifika achievement?
- What are best practice schools doing to in terms of engaging with Pasifika parents?

This has included visits to six schools in Auckland and Christchurch that have been recommended to me by the Pasifika education advisor at UC Education plus. These visits include interviewing the Principals.

### 3. Collecting local Pasifika parent and student voice:

- To deepen my understanding of Pasifika learners in New Zealand schools in relation to their culture, language and identity. There will be a particular focus on my school Samoan community.
- What can we do better in terms of engaging with Pasifika parents?

I have interviewed six Pasifika families from Riccarton Primary School and a group of our year 7 and 8 Pasifika students.

### 4. Educational tour of Samoa

- The objective is to deepen my understanding of Pasifika learners in New Zealand schools particularly in terms of their culture, identity and language. There will be a particular focus on my school Samoan community.

# **SUMMARY OF LITERATURE**

## **Introduction**

As I started on this summary of literature I quickly become to realise the magnitude of the task ahead of me with the range of literature on this subject embedded across a wide range of Ministry of Education documents, books, journal articles, thesis and web resources. Given the time constraints and limitations this summary attempts to pick the main features of the various literatures and present it in plain language, providing reference to what I have deemed most useful, so it would be of easy use to busy Principals and teachers. It would not stand up to the scrutiny of academics to which I apologise. I have tried to make this report more of a narrative of my key understandings of the research while making reference to points that I think would be of use to others.

## **Defining a Pasifika Student in New Zealand**

Pasifika people are defined as those who self-identify as belonging to one or more of the seven major Pacific island groups: Samoan, Tongan, Nuiean, Cook Island, Tokelauan, Tuvalan and Fijian. The Ministry of Education has utilised the term Pasifika over the last five to ten years. These cultures, while being grouped together, share wide-ranging languages and cultural differences. Samoans make up over half of the Pasifika population of New Zealand with approximately 131,000 in 2006. Due to their numbers in New Zealand, the Samoan culture is very prevalent when using the umbrella term Pasifika and has a large influence over what we perceive as Pasifika culture. Pasifika people in New Zealand are becoming more and more diverse in their cultural identities as there are intercultural families. Alongside this we have a mixture of first, second and third generation Pasifika students attending New Zealand schools. Within Pasifika people there is an ever-increasing range of Pasifika language competence. There is also a wide range of cultural practice and beliefs within the Pasifika group. It is important that as educators we do not stereotype or have a one-dimensional view of Pasifika students.

Table 1.1

### Size of main Pacific ethnic groups in New Zealand and estimated resident population in home country

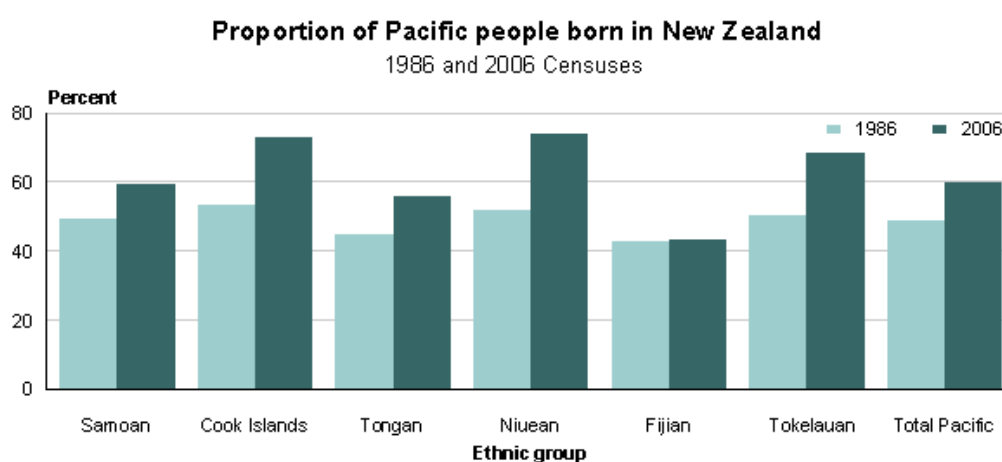
2006

Country	Usual resident population in NZ, 2006 Census	Estimated resident population in home country, 2006 <sup>(1)</sup>	Ratio of Pacific population in NZ compared to home country
Samoa	131,103	176,908	0.74
Cook Islands	58,008	21,388	2.71
Tonga	50,481	114,689	0.44
Niue	22,476	2,166	10.38
Fiji	9,861	905,949	0.01
Tokelau	6,822	1,392	4.9

(1) Sourced from the Central Intelligence Agency's The World Factbook, available from [www.theodora.com/wfb2006/](http://www.theodora.com/wfb2006/).

2

Figure 1.3



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### A short history of Pasifika People in New Zealand

Before trying to examine Pasifika achievement within our schools we first need to understand the recent history of the Pasifika people in New Zealand. Pasifika migration to New Zealand over the last sixty years is linked to the fluctuations of the New Zealand economy. In the 1940s to 1950s there were just 2000 Pasifika people living in New Zealand around 0.1 % of a total population of 1.7 million. Following World War Two and the resulting economic boom that saw our agriculture and industrial sector flourish, large labour shortages resulted in relaxed immigration, as comparatively cheap labour was needed. The period between the 1960s to the 1970s saw large numbers of Pasifika people migrate to New Zealand with the promise of employment and higher pay rates than at home. From 1962 the government

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/people\\_and\\_communities/pacific\\_peoples/pacific-progress-demography.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress-demography.aspx)



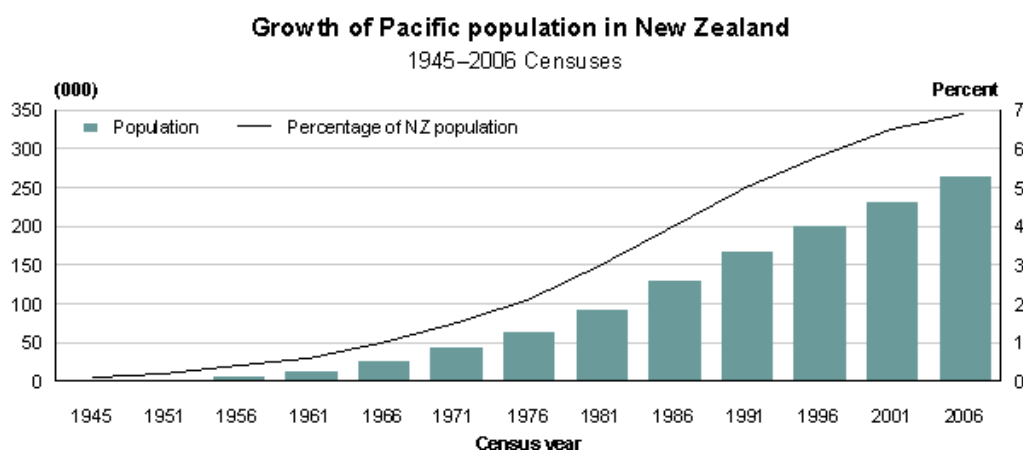
had a policy allowing one thousand immigrants from Western Samoa per year. By the start of the 1970s there were large populations of Pasifika people living in New Zealand, primarily based in Auckland.

Within the 1970s there was an economic downturn, which in turn led to resentment towards Pasifika people in New Zealand who were perceived as taking New Zealand jobs. This resulted in tightening immigration policies and the infamous dawn raids with Pasifika “over stayers” being deported.

However in the early 1980s with the advent of the “think big projects” introduced by the National government labour was again needed and immigration policies were again relaxed. Between 1986 and 1991 the Pasifika population of New Zealand grew eight times faster than the wider national population. In the 1990s a points based system was brought in to the country as the government recognized the need to build towards a “knowledge economy” this lowered the rate of Pasifika people migrating to New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

The 2006 Census data shows that Pasifika people in New Zealand are now a young and growing population.

“In 2006, 265,974 people identified with the Pacific people’s ethnic group, representing 6.9 percent of the total New Zealand population. In 2001, there were 231,801 Pacific people, comprising 6.5 percent of the total population. The Pacific ethnic group had the highest proportion of children (people aged 0 to 14 years) of all of the major ethnic groups, at 37.7 percent.”<sup>4</sup>

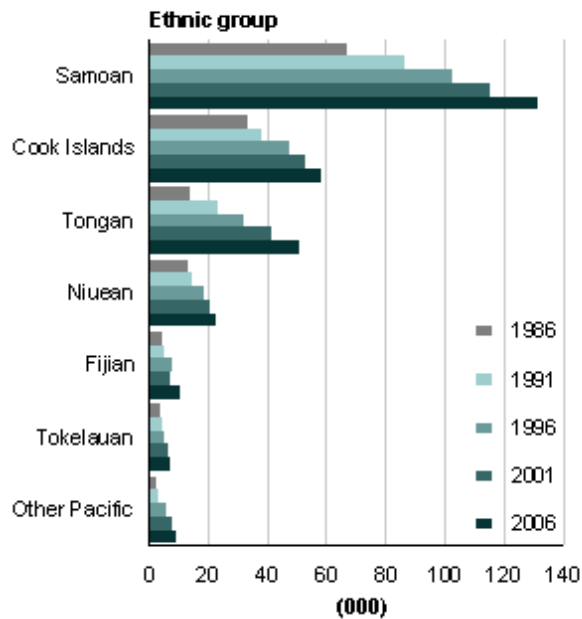


<sup>3</sup> Tanielu and Johnson 2013, More than churches, rugby and festivals-a report on the state of Pasifika people in New Zealand <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/uploads/file/2013%20Pasifika%20SON%20-%20Web.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/2006CensusHomePage/QuickStats/quickstats-about-a-subject/culture-and-identity/pacific-peoples.aspx>

## Growth of Pacific ethnic groups

1986–2006 Censuses



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## Pasifika Students Academic Success in New Zealand

Pasifika underachievement in New Zealand schools is a very real issue facing all New Zealand educators and the education system in general. Although over the last ten years there has been some real improvements, results are below that of non-Pasifika students as shown below;

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/people\\_and\\_communities/pacific\\_peoples/pacific-progress-demography.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress-demography.aspx)

Table 2  
School leavers with NCEA level 1

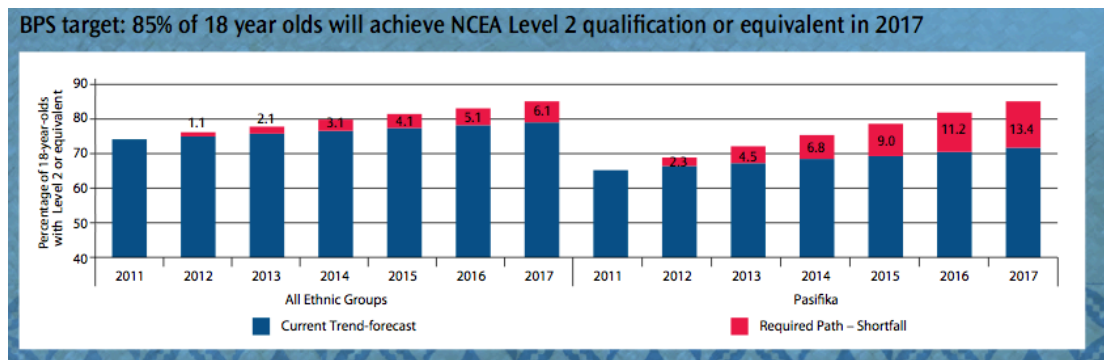
	2005	2006	2007	2008
Percent				
<b>Private/integrated schools</b>				
Pacific students	79.4	82.0	86.9	88.1
Non-Pacific students	91.0	91.0	94.7	92.4
<b>State schools</b>				
Pacific students	59.7	64.5	70.9	76.3
Non-Pacific students	70.3	73.2	79.7	82.3

Table 3  
School leavers who fulfilled the requirements to enter university

	2005	2006	2007	2008
Percent				
<b>Private/integrated schools</b>				
Pacific students	24.9	26.1	33.4	32.2
Non-Pacific students	57.6	60.9	65.1	65.9
<b>State schools</b>				
Pacific students	12.1	14.7	17.1	20.3
Non-Pacific students	30.2	33.7	35.9	40.1

Source: Ministry of Education data.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/people\\_and\\_communities/pacific\\_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx)

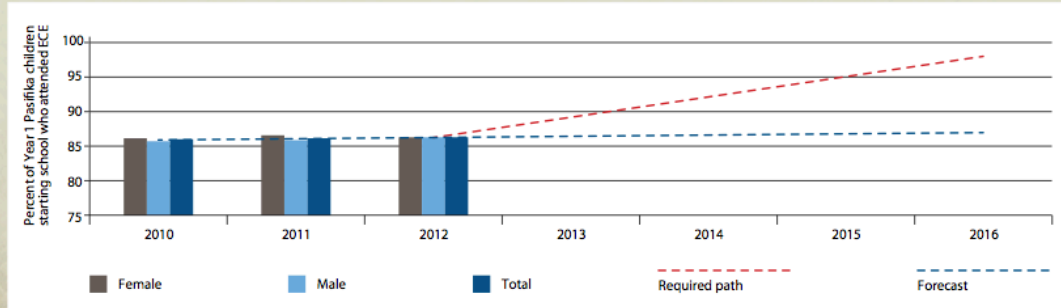
<sup>7</sup> <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/PasifikaEducation/PasifikaEducationPlan2013.aspx>

**Pasifika children have low participation rates in Early Childhood Education**

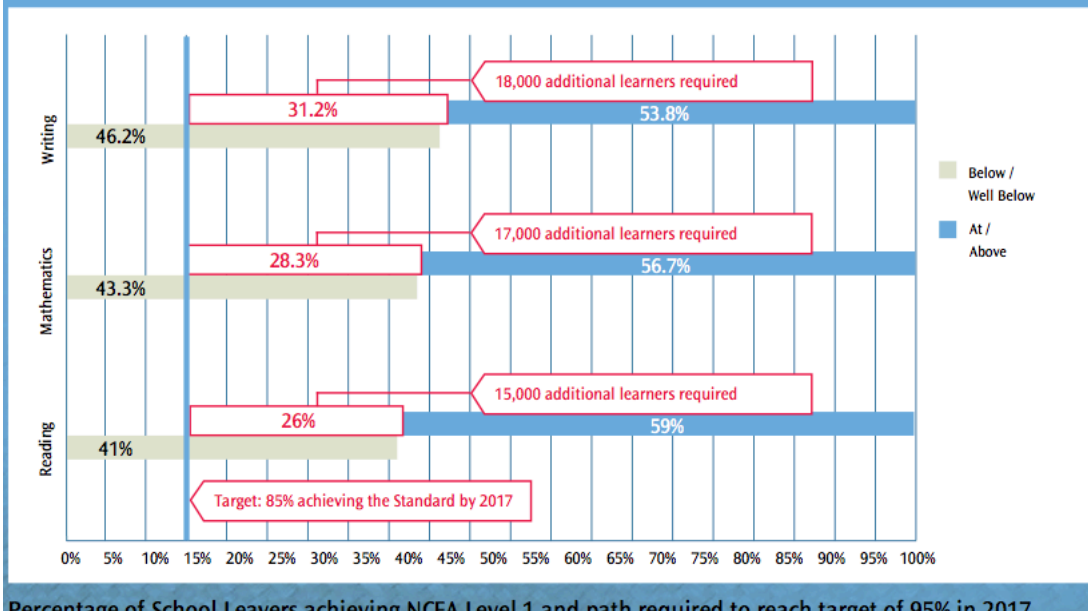
Pakeha	Māori	Pasifika	All Children
97.90%	90.30%	86.20%	94.70%

Table 1: Percentage of prior participation in ECE by ethnic group (June 2011)

**Percentage of Pasifika children starting school who participated in ECE in New Zealand  
Total – actual performance vs. performance required to meet 2016 target of 98% (2010-2016)**



**Pasifika National Standards Achievement: required progress to meet 85%**



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In summary Pasifika students are underachieving in our school system compared to all other students in terms of NCEA qualifications, entry to university qualifications and in the very first collection of National Standards data.

Pasifika people have low rates of enrolment in early childhood education and a lower rate of completion of tertiary qualifications.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/PasifikaEducation/PasifikaEducationPlan2013.aspx>

## **Pasifika Socioeconomic Status**

There are also a number of social economic factors that show that Pasifika people within New Zealand are disadvantaged.

2006 census data shows that of the 110,300 Pasifika children in 2006, 40% or 44,120 children were living in poverty. The median income of Pasifika people was \$20,500 per annum, the third lowest of our major ethnic groups behind European and Maori.

Getting it Right in Aotearoa New Zealand's Maori and Pasifika Students, (2011, He Ara Hou), identified the following key messages about Maori and Pasifika students:

“Key Message No.1 - Māori and Pasifika children suffer disproportionately in low living standards. This has high social and economic costs, and is reflected in the low wellbeing of many Māori and Pasifika children. Just over half of the 200,000 Aotearoa New Zealand children living below the poverty line are Māori and Pasifika. As a result Māori and Pasifika children experience significantly poorer health, educational, and social outcomes than other groups.

Key Message No.2 - A combination of high dependency on welfare benefits, high rates of single parenthood, and a concentration of workers in the manufacturing industries keep Māori and Pasifika families trapped in poverty. Working-aged Māori and Pasifika adults are vulnerable to the cyclical nature of Aotearoa New Zealand's economy and this creates a complex and enduring trap for them and their families. New Zealand is developing a brown social underclass.

Key Message No.3 - The causative links and correlation now established between poverty and violence require the development of new models and policies to address family violence, particularly the violence suffered by children in low-income communities.

Key Message No.4 - Current measurements of Māori and Pasifika wellbeing are inadequate because they do not take account of the Māori and Pasifika worldviews. New measurements and indices need to be developed that reflect Māori and Pasifika values, spirituality and capabilities.

Key Message No. 5 - If we are to reduce the poverty experienced by too many young Māori and Pasifika children then a poverty removal strategy must sit alongside the already accepted commitment to a wealth creation strategy.”

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.everychildcounts.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/He-Ara-Hou-Report-20112.pdf>

## Loss of language

Through a number of factors there has been a large loss of Pasifika language competence over the last two to three decades of Pasifika people in New Zealand. New Zealand is a very monolingual society with 81% of the population only speaking English.

“The dominance of English has contributed to changing patterns of language use in Pasifika communities and to a related decline in bilingualism. (See Starks et al., 2004.) This decline is particularly evident among New Zealand-born Pasifika, who are increasingly ‘switching to’ (or only speaking) English. As Statistics New Zealand concluded in its analysis of the language question in the census, “Pacific people born overseas were almost twice as likely as those born in New Zealand to [still] speak their [Pasifika] language” (Statistics New Zealand, 2002b, page 19). As at 2001, 40.6 per cent of the total Pasifika population in New Zealand could speak only English. The proportion was much higher for New Zealand-born Pasifika (Macpherson, 2004).”<sup>10</sup>

It has been extremely interesting unpacking this research information about Pasifika achievement in schools and the wider social economic factors affecting Pasifika people in New Zealand. The results are very disturbing and the problem is extremely real. There are wide ranging social and welfare factors that are affecting Pasifika people in New Zealand that need to be addressed as well as the academic achievement of Pasifika students, while acknowledging that these two factors are linked. Education is a system within a system.

I question whether the Government could do more with social reform to help the Maori and Pasifika people with health care, low cost housing (particularly when the Pasifika population is mainly situated in Auckland with extremely high housing costs) and basic food and clothing costs. While researching I have come across numerous studies into the impact on poverty on educational achievement. I will not delve into this area as part of this summary of literature but can't help but think that any strategies that increase equity in terms of income and more particularly encourage access to warm and dry housing, access to employment, clothing and food for all of our children would be a great first step.

What we are currently doing to support Pasifika students in the New Zealand education system in individual schools and classrooms is currently not working as is demonstrated through academic achievement results and social economic factors. While there are numerous examples of success stories of high performing Pasifika students well supported by high quality schools and teachers, this is the exception and/or pockets of good practice.

As teachers and leaders within New Zealand schools we are faced with the challenge of how to teach to best cater for a diverse classroom and/or school with a wide range of cultures, including Pasifika students. When groups of

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<sup>10</sup> <http://leap.tki.org.nz/Pasifika-languages-in-New-Zealand>

students are not achieving, as is the case of both Maori and Pasifika students in New Zealand we must as educators examine why and what we can do about it. This sabbatical attempts to start to think about some of the answers.

Bishop (2009)<sup>11</sup> identifies the underachievement of one cultural group within a system as creating an educational debt that we will all pay for. Bishop cites the cause as being the dominance of Pakeha knowledge codes and a long history of assimilations reinforced by education. This results in patterns of non-participation from many children in minority groups. Bishop believes schools need to work in partnership with the diverse cultures that make up a school recognising the cultural knowledge that children bring to school and deliberately addressing the cultural capital imbalance within our schooling system.

“Teachers support learning best when they seek to understand where learners come from and build on their experiences to make learning meaningful (Bishop et al., 2003).<sup>12</sup>

Nakihid (2003)<sup>13</sup> reasons that schools do not recognise and value Pasifika students own cultural identity, which causes underachievement. Further to this Nakihid believes that in response to this and due to incorrect assumptions based on misconceptions, schools and teachers implement practices, which continue the underachievement cycle.

Harker and McConnochie (1995)<sup>14</sup> talk of a monoculture paradigm highlighted by the dominant Anglo-European education system where the cultures and beliefs of the dominant culture lead to a disparity of student achievement of the minority cultures, whereas Bishop 2003 states that an alternate paradigm where all partners in the education system are involved in the shared knowledge creates a multicultural education system that is most equable to all learners.

The research of Allen, Taleni & Robinson, (2008), Bishop, Berryman, Tikakiwai & Richardson (2008), Samu (2006), Tuioti (2002) suggests that poor Pasifika achievement is attributed to three interrelated challenges, deficit theorising by teachers, issues relating to teachers not understanding Pasifika culture, and a lack of effective pedagogy.<sup>15</sup>

These challenges at first look extremely simple and easy to solve. In effect if we can raise our expectations for Pasifika students, get to know our Pasifika

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.edtalks.org/video/culturally-responsive-pedagogy-relations#.UdtNmj4pbOY>

<sup>12</sup> Changing Power Relations in Education: Kaupapa Māori Messages for "Mainstream" Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand Russell Bishop Comparative Education Vol. 39, No. 2, Special Number (27): Indigenous Education: New Possibilities, Ongoing Constraints (May, 2003)

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika\\_education/5907](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika_education/5907)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika\\_education/5907](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika_education/5907)

<sup>15</sup> How can we teach them when they won't listen?" How teacher beliefs about Pasifika values and Pasifika ways of learning affect student behaviour and achievement Lorraine Spiller, SET 2012, N53, Page60

students cultural identity and use effective pedagogy, the problem would be solved and Pasifika students' results would begin to improve.

As with everything in education it is never that simple but after looking through the research and reading numerous articles on Pasifika achievement, it has become apparent to me that as a whole we can improve what we do by using practical strategies and by making use of the research. This, however, requires a consistent high quality and reflective approach.



## Curriculum and Policy Documents

What is the education system in New Zealand doing to improve the student achievement of Pasifika students? What resources and research do we have?

The Pasifika Education Plan (2013-2017)<sup>16</sup> states “that a key goal for the government is to create the conditions for strong, vibrant and successful Pasifika communities-communities that can help build a more productive and competitive economy for all New Zealanders.” The document outlines that the education system needs to put Pasifika families and communities at the centre of the education system and schools need to respond to the identities and cultures of the specific Pasifika groups. The vision statement in the plan is that five out of five Pasifika learners are participating, engaging and achieving within the education system. It then outlines a variety of goals, targets and actions. The goals of the plan are below:

### “High-level Goals

The Government has indicated that the following are their high level goals for Pasifika education:

- continued improvement in literacy and numeracy achievement across all levels of education
- improved attendance as a foundation for engagement in learning
- emphasis on the importance of Pasifika identities, languages and cultures
- full implementation of Youth Guarantee for Pasifika learners and creating pathways for success
- Pasifika learners acquiring skills essential to the future New Zealand workforce.

### Long-term Outcomes

What we want to achieve by 2016:

- Increased participation in quality ECE to 98%.
- Improved National Standards performance.
- More learners achieving NCEA level 2 or an equivalent qualification.
- School Leavers entering tertiary education at level 4 or above.
- Parents, families and communities are knowledgeable, demanding and actively understand their child’s progress and achievement.
- Families are knowledgeable and are able to support their child in making good choices about education pathways and career options.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/PasifikaEducation/PasifikaEducationPlan2013.aspx>

## Short-term Outcomes

What we need to do to achieve our long-term outcomes:

- Provide access to quality ECE services.
- High quality, highly effective and culturally responsive teaching is necessary to accelerate Pasifika success.
- Inform and empower families to actively take part and understand their child's progress and achievement.
- Inform and empower families to support their young person in making good choices about education pathways and career options.
- Empower and encourage Pasifika learners to participate and attain higher levels of tertiary education.”

The plan is a very much an overriding document that puts Pasifika achievement at the forefront of the Governments priorities for achievement. It would be of some use for highlighting the emphasis that the Government and Ministry of Education is placing on Pasifika achievement and Boards of Trustees with Pasifika students would be well placed to align their local school goals and target with these national priorities. The overarching vision of putting Pasifika learners and their family at the center of the learning and decision making process and having them fully contributing and participating is a key point that becomes clear throughout the other research that I have been looking through, and parallels Bishop's (2003) emphasis on creating an inclusive school culture.

There a wide range of key documents that map out what is taught in New Zealand Schools and how we teach, all based on best practice research. These include among others the New Zealand Curriculum Document (2007)<sup>17</sup>, Effective Literacy Practice (2006)<sup>18</sup>, The Literacy Learning Progressions (2010)<sup>19</sup> and the National Standards Documents (2009)<sup>20</sup>. All of these documents include references to effective pedagogy that includes knowledge of the learner including knowledge of their culture and identity, that good teachers recognise the need to utilise contexts that make use of prior learner knowledge and that effective teachers attend to the cultural and linguistic diversity of all teachers. These documents give clear and specific guidance on effective pedagogy and the need to teach using appropriate pedagogy and contexts that suit the needs of the learners. Examples are:

Effective Literacy Practice (2006, pg. 10)

“Knowledge of the learner encompasses knowing about the pathway of progress for each student and about the patterns of progress for literacy learners in general at different points in their development. Teachers need an extensive and continually developing knowledge of each student's language and literacy practices outside school as well as in school.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum>

<sup>18</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards/Reading-and-writing-standards/Effective-literacy-practic>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.literacyprogressions.tki.org.nz/>

<sup>20</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards>

<sup>21</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards/Reading-and-writing-standards/Effective-literacy-practic>

New Zealand Curriculum, (2007 pg. 34) - Effective Pedagogy “Effective teachers foster positive relationships within environments that are caring, inclusive, non-discriminatory and cohesive. Effective teachers attend to the cultural and linguistic diversity of all their students.”<sup>22</sup>

These documents highlight the importance of the teachers having positive relationships with their students, knowing them as people and their strengths and needs as learners. This includes knowledge of their culture and language.

The Best Evidence Synthesis including Quality Teaching for Diverse Students, Alton-Lee, 2003,<sup>23</sup> Teaching Professional Learning and Development, Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung, 2007<sup>24</sup> and School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why? Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd 2009<sup>25</sup>, gives us a large volume of quality, localised research on effective teaching, learning and leadership for diverse students. Alton-Lee (2012) in the diagram below gives a very clear guide as to the research-based high level findings of three of the syntheses that lead to positive achievement in diverse schools.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5959>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/15341>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/60169/60170>

**Table 1. Overview of high-level findings from five best evidence syntheses focused on effective leadership, professional learning, and teaching**

School Leadership and Student Outcomes	Teacher Professional Learning and Development	Quality Teaching for Diverse (All) Learners
Establish goals and expectations	Focus on valued student outcomes	Focus on valued student outcomes
Promote and participate in teacher learning and development	Engage knowledgeable expertise external to participating teachers to challenge assumptions and develop new knowledge and skills	Use knowledge, evidence, and inquiry to improve teaching
Resource strategically	Use context-specific approaches to develop teacher knowledge, skills, and adaptive expertise in high-impact pedagogies	
Select, develop, and use smart tools	Select, develop, and use smart tools	Select, develop, and use smart tools and worthwhile tasks
Ensure administrative decisions are informed by knowledge about effective pedagogy	Arrange multiple opportunities for teachers to learn and apply information Integrate theory and practice to enable deep change	Ensure effective and sufficient opportunities for all students to learn
Build relational trust Ensure an orderly and supportive environment	Create conditions of trust and challenge Provide teachers with opportunities to process new learning with others	Develop caring, collaborative learning communities that are inclusive of diverse (all) learners
Create educationally powerful connections	Enable teachers to activate educationally powerful connections	Activate educationally powerful <b>connections to learners' knowledge, experiences, and identities</b>
Plan, coordinate, and evaluate teaching and the curriculum	Ensure active involvement of wider school-based leadership in leading, organising, and participating in learning opportunities	Scaffold learning and provide appropriate feed forward and feedback on learning
Engage in constructive problem talk Engage in open-to-learning conversations	Develop approaches that are responsive to teachers' learning processes and do not bypass teachers' existing theories	<b>Be responsive to all students'</b> learning, identities, and well-being
Analyse and solve complex problems	Maintain momentum through self-regulated inquiry	Promote thoughtful learning strategies, thoughtful discourse, and student self-regulation
Plan, co-ordinate, and evaluate teaching and the curriculum	Use assessment for professional inquiry	Use assessment for learning
<b>Use a collaborative, inquiry and knowledge-building approach, aligning conditions within and beyond the classroom to optimise valued outcomes for diverse (all) learners</b>		

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<sup>26</sup> [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0014/108023/Evidence-for-Improvement-and-Public-Good.pdf](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0014/108023/Evidence-for-Improvement-and-Public-Good.pdf) Pg. 14

## Effective Strategies that Work for Pasifika Students

So what works for Pasifika students in our schools? If we as leaders and teachers want to make real change and improvements for our Pasifika students what does the research say will work?

The following is a summary of the main points of the research that I have read with my comments and ideas where appropriate.

### A Focus on Quality Teaching

There is no magic bullet for Pasifika students. Quality teaching and an alignment across a school and groups of schools of high quality research based practice will make an impact on underachieving students, including Pasifika students. Our under-achieving Pasifika students need high quality teaching across the curriculum - the best teacher for a Pasifika student is the best teacher.

ERO (2012) “Highly effective schools had systems in place that made inquiry a part of classroom practice, created a culture where there was an alignment of practice focused on improved student achievement.”<sup>27</sup>

School leadership needs to ensure that all of their endeavours are focused 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 the school need to encourage a teacher as inquiry process where teachers and leaders regularly look at, and reflect on these 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. Schools which create conditions to do this in a shared way, creating a strong sense of collective responsibility for learner’s student achievement will achieve more success (Robinson et al, 2009)<sup>28</sup>. Professional development needs to be targeted to the specific needs of the teachers with an emphasis on improved student achievement.

There is a need to align practice across schools so that students are receiving high quality teaching across the school and can build on the experiences from one class to the next. Students need to have an orderly, safe and supported environment where they know what to expect, are encouraged to learn and feel valued and supported within their learning. The Pasifika Schooling Improvement Report, (Amituani-Toloa, McNaughton et al, 2010)<sup>29</sup> found that

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Improving-Education-Outcomes-for-Pacific-Learners-May-2012/Introduction/The-Pasifika-Education-Plan-2009-2012>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/60180/BES-Leadership-Web.pdf](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/60180/BES-Leadership-Web.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/65049/933\\_PSIR-Finalb.pdf](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/65049/933_PSIR-Finalb.pdf)

schools on the school improvement initiative with the greatest coherence of teaching practice made the most progress with their students, even showing that the coherence was more important than the individual expertise of teachers.

ERO (2012)<sup>30</sup> found that a minority of schools had initiated programmes aimed at explicitly improving Pacific student engagement and learning outcomes. These programmes included increasing teachers' and/or trustees' knowledge of Pacific cultures, setting high achievement expectations, reinforcing effective teaching strategies, and making extra provision for English and/or Pacific languages programmes.

In a study of the views of Pacific Island students and their families and communities, Fletcher et al. (2008, 2009)<sup>31</sup> 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, eg. authentic Pacific perspectives and celebrating the life of Pacific Island communities;
2. Pacific Island students writing their own cultural experiences within their lives (such as using Prior Knowledge);
3. Regular feedback and feed-forward or quality feedback and feed-forward which was specific and transparent (in that students saw the purpose in needing to know about what and why they were learning and teaching certain concepts and ideas);
4. Teacher awareness of bullying (racism) and the need for it to be removed from both in and out of the classroom;
5. Good class management; and
6. The importance of employing a Pasifika Liaison person to bridge the language barriers, someone who could speak the home islands language".<sup>32</sup>

Quality teaching is essentially important for Pasifika students. They need to have well-structured and organised learning activities at the appropriate level to be cognitively challenging. Teachers need to utilise formative strategies to demonstrate to the students what is required and what success looks like. Formal high-level vocabulary needs to be utilised and explained, as it is the language of learning.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Improving-Education-Outcomes-for-Pacific-Learners-May-2012/Introduction/The-Pasifika-Education-Plan-2009-2012>

<sup>31</sup> <http://myportfolio.school.nz/artefact/file/download.php?file=468667&view=92809>

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/people\\_and\\_communities/pacific\\_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx)

## Recognising and valuing the identity of Pasifika Students

Alton-Lee (2003)<sup>33</sup> 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. For Pasifika students this requires teachers to understand their day-to-day experiences, their cultural background and the dimensions that make this up including language and cultural values”.

Using the scope to localise the school’s curriculum, schools should ensure that their topics and activities recognise and reflect the Pasifika cultures where appropriate. Ferguson et al (2008) states “that Pasifika students need to be able to see their language and identity reflected through the curriculum.”

This would involve allowing students to write about their home lives, to talk and share their experiences regularly, to encourage presentations of songs, dances etc. from their home culture, and to utilise their home language when completing learning activities.

Ringold (2005)<sup>34</sup> states “that in an effort to be culturally responsive teachers need to be wary of their own pre-conceived beliefs about cultural stereotypes that can have an adverse effect on Pasifika students by limiting their learning opportunities.” Teachers need to find out about their students cultures and provide a wide range of challenging activities that challenge Pasifika students to advance in their learning.

Having an understanding and knowledge of a Pasifika child’s home life and culture is essential to make real connections with the child. Their world is a complex mix of family, church, cultural beliefs and their peer world. Their parents’ world is again different. This is best summed up in the quote below;

“Most students live in five or six worlds. They live in the world of their family; the world of their culture; for many, the world of their church; the world of school; as they get older, the world of part-time paid employment; and most of all, their peer world. All these worlds are a reality for them and all are important to some extent. The children learn to live in each of the worlds but most of their parents are familiar only with the family, cultural, and church worlds and have little understanding of the worlds of work or school and virtually no understanding of their peer world. The teachers understand their work, school, and peer worlds but, in some cases, have little knowledge of their family, cultural, and church worlds ” (Hill and Hawk 1998).<sup>35</sup>

Schools with Pasifika students need to give opportunities for their staff to understand the world of their learners and to work in partnerships with the diverse cultures that make up their school. This will enable staff to have an

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5959>

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse\\_for\\_stats/people\\_and\\_communities/pacific\\_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx](http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/pacific_peoples/pacific-progress-education/schooling.aspx)

<sup>35</sup> Hill, J., & Hawk, K. (1998). SET: Research Information for Teachers, 2, item 4.



in-depth understanding of their students both as learners and as people. This will enable them to more readily make connections for the students within their learning, and will lead to a more supportive and effective learning environment. This is well summed up in the following;

“Pasifika pedagogies that are being developed in these schools, in the sense of being adapted to Pasifika learners, draw on background knowledge including topics and event knowledge, language patterns and activities, and the students and teachers are aware of this. However, in addition there is the dimension of a strong emotional relationship which together with the instructional attributes, has elements of being both rigorous and challenging as well as being respectful and empathetic.” Pasifika Improvement Report (2010)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika\\_education/ua-aoina-le-manogi-o-le-lolo-pasifika-schooling-improvement-research-final-report/acknowledgements](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika_education/ua-aoina-le-manogi-o-le-lolo-pasifika-schooling-improvement-research-final-report/acknowledgements)



## Using ESOL Principles throughout Teaching

“Being bilingual is not an impediment to academic achievement of Pasifika learners” Pasifika Improvement Report (2010)<sup>37</sup>

“A focus on cultural diversity alone will not make a difference to students learning unless it is accompanied with recognition of a focus on linguistic diversity” (Walqui, 2000).<sup>38</sup>

A child’s first language is the basis from which their skill and knowledge of English will be developed. A Pasifika student’s first language needs to be supported at both home and school. Throughout the research that I have read it is without doubt that children who are strong in their first language are more likely to be successful in their English acquisition. Teachers need to acknowledge the many languages that make up their classes. While this appears challenging it should be attempted in small steps. An example for a senior primary school class may be that the students are taking home sheets to complete with their parents, for perhaps topic specific vocabulary and concepts - these could be then shared and displayed back in the classroom. This activity if repeated regularly as part of a classroom programme will help value the language of Pasifika students and give them an increased understanding of the important concepts needed for learning.

There is a vast amount of quality resources available to help teachers and schools develop effective policy and practices in terms of English language learners. The best place to start is <http://esolonline.tki.org.nz> .

In summary, 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. They will have a balance between productive and receptive language and provide multiple opportunities for authentic language use.

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika\\_education/ua-aoina-le-manogi-o-le-lolo-pasifika-schooling-improvement-research-summary-report/3.-summary-of-findings](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/pasifika_education/ua-aoina-le-manogi-o-le-lolo-pasifika-schooling-improvement-research-summary-report/3.-summary-of-findings)

<sup>38</sup> <http://englishonline.tki.org.nz/English-Online/Teacher-needs/Professional-readings/Diversity/Supporting-Pasifika-learners>

## Having Positive Student Teacher Relationships with Our Pasifika Students

Having respectful positive teacher student relationships with Pasifika students is essential for Pasifika success. Across a lot of research it becomes apparent that Pasifika students respond well to teachers who they sense care about their success, believe in them, have high expectations and are well organised.

In the New Zealand context, Hill & Hawk (2000)<sup>39</sup>, reporting on the AIMHI Project on effective teaching in low deciles, multi-cultural schools in New Zealand, stated that the most effective teachers of students at these schools had positive, respectful relationships with their students. The students they interviewed felt they must have a positive relationship with their teacher before learning could take place. They found the more successful teachers in these schools had high levels of self-efficacy, or a belief that they can invoke change and improve performance. They cited numerous things that teachers needed to do to be effective including understanding the worlds of the students, having a culture of mutual respect with their students and creating a positive class climate. Alongside this they also point to the most effective teachers being well organized, knowing the content of their lessons and having clear learning routines in their classroom.

The Government's Positive Behaviour for Learning Programme (PB4L)<sup>40</sup>, which has been recently implemented across New Zealand schools, emphasizes creating a supportive school wide learning environment. This programme incorporates many actions that would enhance positive student teacher relationships across a school.

This relationship is developed in part by taking the time to get to know the student both as a person and as a learner. Students are more likely to enjoy the subject and put in more effort for teachers of whom they had a more positive relationship.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/schooling/5459>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/EducationInitiatives/PositiveBehaviourForLearning.aspx>

## High-level Engagement with Pasifika Parents

There is a large amount of research that points to strong involvement and engagement of parents within schooling has a positive effect on their children's academic success. Alton-Lee (2003)<sup>41</sup>, Biddulph (2003)<sup>42</sup>, Robinson et al, (2009)<sup>43</sup> all put 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 six of the Pasifika Education Plan<sup>44</sup> focuses on the effective engagement of Pasifika families.

Effective engagement of Pasifika families need to concentrate on understanding where their child is at in the curriculum, their strengths and weaknesses, and what strategies they can do at home to support their children with their learning. Effective home school partnerships will focus on educating parents on things that will make a difference at home. The Reading Together Programme is a positive example of a research based successful home school initiative that is achieving positive results. In summary, 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 oriented and focused on improving student outcomes.
- Effective parental engagement happens largely at home, for example parents will do things at home that support the school.
- There is timely two-way communication between school and parents in successful home-school partnerships.

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/5959>

<sup>42</sup> Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J., & Biddulph, C. (2003). The complexity of community and family influences on children's achievement in Aotearoa New Zealand: Best evidence synthesis. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/60169/60170>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/NZEducation/EducationPolicies/PasifikaEducation/PasifikaEducationPlan2013.aspx>

## VISIT TO BEST PRACTICE SCHOOLS

What initiatives and programmes are being utilised by best practice Primary Schools in New Zealand to be culturally responsive to Pasifika learners and to improve Pasifika achievement?

What are best practice schools doing to in terms of engaging with Pasifika parents?

I visited a total of six schools all of which had been recommended to me by education advisors as schools who were running positive learning programmes within their schools and were catering well for their Pasifika students. The size of the schools ranged from 150 to 550 students, they ranged in decile rating from 1 to 6, and had Pasifika populations ranging from 6% to 90. There were three full primary schools and three contributing schools. Three of the schools were in Christchurch and three were situated in Auckland.

All schools made some use of the Pasifika Education Plan, had annual plan targets specifically for Pasifika students, collected student achievement data on Pasifika achievement, shared it with their Board of Trustees and utilized it to some degree to make decisions about their learning programmes. They all, directly or indirectly, allocate resourcing to their Pasifika students and review its effectiveness.

I asked a range of questions, some of which were about teaching and learning in their schools in general and some were specific questions about their Pasifika achievement and how they cater for Pasifika students. This is a summary of their responses clustered to make reading easy and include my comments and reflections.

When asked “**what effective teaching and learning looked like in their schools?**” I received a range of answers all founded on effective pedagogy as stated in the New Zealand curriculum. These included statements including the following:

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

On reflection of these statements, strong themes coming through include consistency of high quality practice that is targeted to the learning needs of students, that there are strong relationships between teachers and students, and effective formative practices are being utilised.

The next question I asked Principals was to be more specific and **identify what practices they would want to see in each class in your school?** The answers included:

- “Clear learning intentions, specific learning for each learner, clear teacher student learning relationships”
- “Small group learning in numeracy and literacy for a minimum of 3 hours per day”
- “Modern learning environments, individual learning tools, lots of scaffolding and questioning to encourage thinking”
- “Grouping, high expectations”
- “Opportunity for students to talk, 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 classroom, including how the curriculum was to be taught and for how long. There was an emphasis on grouping and targeted specific teaching based on the needs of the students.

I then asked the Principals in their opinion **which of these strategies and practices do they believe are most important for Pasifika students?**

Answers included:

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

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

The next group of questions I will link together in my summary.

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

- “Utilise culture at school events especially at the start and end of each year”
- “Use it all the time throughout learning and through learning contexts”
- “Utilised a teacher with Samoan language skills to make word banks for different topics and contexts”
- “Our teachers can’t know Samoan, Tongan, Fijian, and Cook Island languages but we can have our own school inclusive culture that recognises the values and beliefs of these cultures and attempts to use the basis of the language where possible”
- “Cultural groups, celebrations throughout the year”
- “We do not do language weeks but we do try to use the language and value it within our classrooms which is student led”

**How do you attempt to make connections with your 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 RICCARTON PRIMARY SCHOOL**

My own school is Riccarton Primary School ([www.riccartonprimary.school.nz](http://www.riccartonprimary.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 Riccarton Primary 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 RICCARTON PRIMARY 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 Riccarton Primary 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.

## **PASIFIKA MALAGA (JOURNEY) TO SAMOA**

### **Report on Educational Visit to Savai'i**

As the final piece of my sabbatical I had the privilege on going on an educational visit to Savaii as part of a Malaga (journey) organised by UC Education Plus and run by Leali'ie'e Tofilau Tufulasi Taleni. This was always going to be a highlight of my sabbatical but it will go down as one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

The broad aim of the trip was that as educators we would improve our culturally responsive practice through gaining a wealth of knowledge of Pasifika student's cultures, identities and language. The trip itinerary included staying four nights in the village of Vaiafai in Iva, Savai'i Samoa. We were being hosted by local families and experiencing the Fa'a Samoa (way of life) including an Ava ceremony, participating in the preparation of meals, Fafia nights, visiting local schools, attending church, sightseeing and generally immersing ourselves in Samoan village life. As with all experiences the people you share the experience with have a huge bearing on what you take away. To this end the trip was extremely rewarding with the journey being shared with 23 other very professional educators from around New Zealand who were all very motivated to learn from, enjoy and take as much out of the experience as possible.

Throughout the trip, I along with all members of the touring group was overwhelmed by the generosity, hospitality and the warmth we were shown as guests in the village. From the moment we arrived and experienced the Ava ceremony (which is one of the most important customs of the Samoa which involves a solemn ritual where ceremonial beverage to mark important occasions in Samoan society); to the time we left at the end of the visit we were very much treated as very important special guests. This included huge meals, dynamic performances, our fales being made up every day for us and a general feeling of being looked after at all times. Being fanned by the children during meal times, being waited on, and eating before our hosts did - the general hospitality was amazing. The warmth of this welcome and the excitement that we felt when visiting schools, really emphasized the Samoan values of love, respect, and generosity. Staying with families that on the surface had so little by our western standards but had generosity of spirit was extremely humbling. As in all culture, food plays an important part in daily life. We were lucky enough to experience an umu and a number of other local dishes. Meal times are a time of getting together and sharing with each other, love and respect.

As educators of Samoan students in New Zealand we must attempt to understand the high regard, we are held by the Samoan people and the great pride they get out of hosting people and showing and demonstrating respect and love. I cannot overstate the fact that we actually felt that we had become part of the extended family of these village families.

The place of the Christian church within Samoan traditional life is huge. Every night the conch shell is blown to signal the start and end of curfew, which is a time of prayer and reflection. There are many denominations of the Christian churches. During the curfew you would hear hymns and the curfew is closely guarded by chiefs and untitled men. Sunday is church day where almost the entire village attends one of the churches within the village. There is a huge feast at the end of church with all of the family. All activities start and end with prayer and the church and God's word underlies every essence of Samoan daily life. If you know Samoan students, there is an extremely good chance that they will be regularly attending church and that the Christian religion will have a huge bearing on everything that they do. Activities within their home life will start and end with prayer.

The family is at the heart of Samoan life. Large extended families are the norm with lots of children running around. Within this family structure there seems to be a series of daily routines, chores and expectations of all within the family to serve the family. This may be an older daughter looking after younger siblings, or young male children picking the leaves up from around the property in the morning. Everyone seems to know their place in the family how they can contribute and what they are needed for. Older siblings are expected to look after younger children in the family and take an active part in the care of the younger children.

The Matai or chiefly system, which is very complicated and intricate, starts with being the chief of the family. The chief role is to ensure the family is well looked after, fed and cared for. The role of oral language and debate is central to this process with the Ava ceremony being a place where chiefs will debate their right to speak at various occasions. The central Fale of the family home is the meeting place where topics are discussed and debated. I still have much to learn about the chiefly system and despite numerous web searches; I still don't completely understand the ins and outs of its intricacies.

Song and dance plays an important part in Samoan life. We were treated to numerous Fiafia (dance) performances incorporating both traditional and western music and dance.

It hits you right from the start of your time in the village that the Samoan culture has a very large and gregarious sense of humour. Starting with the very warm smiles to the laughter and self-deprecating humour where things will be laughed at during dances etc, where no one takes offence but everyone is having a huge amount of fun. Whether it is someone dancing funny as part of a traditional dance, or an older man attempting to climb a coconut tree, the Samoan people were very quick to see the funny side of all situations. There seems to be some form of comedian in every village who is quick to get people to laugh and joke.



The trip allowed me the privileged position of immersing myself in Samoan culture and reflecting on my experience of teaching Samoan students over the last twenty years. It refocused me to connect more with these students and it gave me a far greater understanding of their cultural background and beliefs. It was tremendous experience and one I would highly recommend to others.

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