

## **Carrying the Hopes and Dreams of the Families and Children of Our Pasifika Community.**

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**"parents and teachers... [have] complementary roles in relation to children's education and ...that children benefit when the home-school relationship is characterised by reciprocity, trust and respect" (Beveridge, 2004, p.3). *Literature Review on the Effective Engagement of Pasifika Parents & Communities in Education (PISCPL) Dr. R. Gorinski and C. Fraser, 2006***

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### **Rationale:**

Many South Auckland schools have a growing demographic of Pasifika\* families. Meeting the needs of Pasifika children, engaging with families to build successful, meaningful relationships can prove to be challenging. My research into effective practice, allowed me to identify successful models of collaboration.

The ongoing development of relationships requires an ongoing commitment from the board and staff, in order to develop trust and confidence within and between the members of the community. Meeting face to face with the parents, off site, and with appropriate language support assists in identification of specific local needs. As part of my sabbatical project I took an opportunity to investigate property works which allow for a culturally responsive environment to be developed to meet this unique and growing demographic.

### **Who are our Pasifika** *(Gabrielle – Sisifo Makisi – TRCC Carrying the Tapa July 2014)*

They're

- Young, fast growing, and diverse.
- 6.9% of the total population
- 59% NZ born
- 67% live in Auckland
- 49% are Samoan
- 77% earn under \$50k p/a
- 44% had no qualifications in 2007
- 73% of Pasifika students live in Auckland

### **Values – “They are important, make them count”**

Pasifika values came through strongly in my research into what works for Pasifika families to support engagement. Whilst these values are tagged 'Pasifika', it is important for school leaders and teachers to remember that the values are not just for Pasifika but are essentially important to acknowledge in Pasifika cultures. The values of reciprocity, respect, inclusion, service, family, belonging, spirituality, leadership, love, and relationships are the core of all Pasifika decisions. Leaders of learning in schools should be asking themselves “how are we demonstrating 'Values' in our school?”

It was clear from my research into successful engagement of Pasifika Communities, that personalising the 'Pasifika Education Plan' for your school is a great place to begin. Based on my evidence 'in the field' this great place to start makes a difference. Generally schools start with the basics for ALL

CHILDREN in our vision. Then move to making the vision respond to the specific values of our Pasifika families in order to then personalise it to our Pasifika. A recommendation is that each school needs to take / make time to create a school Pasifika education plan. By asking the key questions of how do we do this in our school?... Considering how our school includes / supports / manages these values, and subsequently, creating a list under each of your own school specific actions and culturally entrenched activities under each of the values headings.

I found, in my work during my sabbatical term, that in schools that successfully engage their Pasifika families, the values already exist within their school culture e.g. sports, attendance, leadership.

***“I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do”***

***Helen Keller (activist / and author)***

### **Thinking creatively - “Do things differently”**

Further to having in place the key Pasifika Values the school leader and management team, were asking of themselves ‘ what ways that we can do it better... what can we do differently?...’

It is essential to add to the schools own Pasifika Education Plan, beyond the activities. School leaders in effective schools that engaged Pasifika families actively consider ways that their schools cultural connectedness was able to link to the school’s curriculum. The possibilities included considering the Arts (Poly Club), Student fono (student voice), a Pacific Programme (e.g. Junior Pasifika day), and Data Analysis (Areas to focus on, next steps).

### **How do we measure value added? – “lets start at the very beginning, (*that’s a very good place to start!*)”**

I identified in the visits to other schools and through my study that making improvements to the way we track achievement for our Pasifika learners can support their on-going success. An idea to support school leaders and decision makers could be to start the data tracking, and reflection, planning and implementation for just one year group (year 1’s), following these learners over the year, then adding to the collation by including the year below in the following year. Until such time that you have whole school tracking and implementation for Pasifika learners.

Utilising these data discussions at a Pasifika fono can be helpful to plan the communities’ desires and aspirations too.

A successful implementation model in one school used teacher units to create a job description with a single unit attached to it. This meant that a teacher could be made responsible for the achievement of the Pasifika students within that school. Scheduling and holding the fono meetings (with support), and driving the collaborated creation of the 'xxx School PE Plan'.

Recognising that our people, in our community, have a right to the data, and have a right to contribute to the bigger picture and planning for the future is ultimately what successful engagement is working for. Taking time to disaggregate the data in those schools that successfully plan and implement programmes to support success for Pasifika saw that attendance and engagement were improved. (For example in one school - those that were involved in the poly club compared to those that weren't saw increased attainment of academic success, and improved attendance - "I only come to school for Poly"(st); "NCEA results demonstrated a significant difference for those children who are connected!" (t)

### **Give Voice - "Let me be heard":**

Another key consistent piece of work that effective practitioners and school leaders were doing, in my observation, was to respond to what their students were telling them. The gathering of powerful student voice was evident across schools. Successful schools know what their kids are thinking and feeling, they understand what turns them on to learning, and they create the best environments to meet the needs of their learners. In some schools this appeared as a 'learning committee', where Pasifika representatives were given place and time to participate in wide and broad conversations in order to share what is getting in the way of learning. In other schools it was in the form of student surveys, asking broad questions such as "what makes learning fun at xxxx school"? Providing opportunity for Pasifika students to state across the board, their reasons for success, and be able to harness their responses as a tool to support others is proven as a powerful motivator for success engagement. Specifically for myself, in my role, asking 'how do we demonstrate that we know our students at VRS?' became an important reflection during my sabbatical.



### **Creating Relationships – “Connect the dots”**

Once we have established who our learners are, we need to make a difference for each of them. Each teacher does not operate in isolation – teachers need to understand that we are given a task and responsibility to teach. As a school leader we need high expectations of our staff to ensure that all learners have access to equity (justice) in their learning. Effective teaching programmes are evident in successfully engaging schools, which have a focus on the learner, and the learners own unique place within their own unique journey. Students need to be seen as partners in their learning, helping teachers to understand what makes them tick, what gets in the way, and what inspires them. Sometimes teachers need to be reminded that “Parents have given their best gifts to you.” As we already know Best Evidence Synthesis for highly effective practice indicates that the importance of THE teacher in the classroom is BOTTOM LINE! Our teachers of Pasifika learners should be telling their life story, talking to the children about where they come from and where they’ve been.



### **Cultural transference - “What works for one, will work for another”**

Take action to ‘decolonise the school, the ideas that work to actively promote engagement and improve success for all our students are not specific to only one culture. One principal said “school is an ‘Alien’ institution for Maori children” school has neglected to take into account the knowledge of the children bring. To ignore the Maori curriculum - devalues the Maori curriculum. The same should be said for our Pasifika children. Our teachers, support staff, board, policy and decision makers, need to reclaim, recognise, and value the cultural knowledge that exists within our school. We need to reclaim, recognise and value the culture and heritage of all our learners. The idea that Bruner conceptualises in the Constructivist theory, (Bruner, J. (1960). *The Process of Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press Harley, 1995 ) ‘that you can bring any big idea to any age - as long as you bring their experience’ is essential to explore when considering how to best meet the unique and individual needs of our all our tamariki, including our Pasifika children.

### **Physical environment – “My place, I belong”**

Ultimately while each school I visited was unique there were some key features that signalled to me (the visitor) that this school cares about its Pasifika learners. In each of the schools especially where a significant proportion of the learners were Pasifika, there was evidence that I was

a) in a school – but more importantly

b) a school in NZ. Actually, in most schools I knew exactly what school I was in.

During each visit, and at each school, where the leader valued and responded to the cultural diversity of the learners, where the leader placed an emphasis on knowing the learners, and where the leader had high expectations about meeting the needs of the learners, the classroom environments demonstrated the evidence of successful diversity and cultural responsiveness. This included the use of greetings, patterns, artefacts, and celebrations.

Physical spaces had been created through a number of different processes. In some children had created bi cultural wall displays evidencing multi-cultural heritage. In others administration upgrades had allowed for beautiful etched glasswork with the multi-lingual greetings to be evident from the moment you stepped to the entrance. Fale, where communities gathered for sports events, or school picnics, allowed for families to feel at home. One leader spoke of the need to change the tone of the fale “from a consequence shade area “ (e.g. children who had forgotten their hats) because children spoke of them as something completely opposite from the intended purpose. This is where discussion with whole staff and shared community meetings support the knowledge and understandings of a cultural group who have made their home in New Zealand, often generations ago, but still need the connection and understanding to create a common ground for learning.



### **In summary:**

#### **Key Learning's from successful models of engagement:**

Pasifika Engagement and ways to make our school environments friendly welcoming and responsive to the needs of the diverse cultural groups go some way to ensuring the needs and aspirations of Pasifika are recognised in school planning and charters.

We are entrusted to carry the 'mana' of all children in our schools. All school leaders need to 'lead the charge' in ensuring that all (children and their families) that cross the threshold of our schools

recognise, from the moment they step inside the gate, that we truly believe that 'children are the treasure'. It is essential, in a school that actively fosters relationships with Pasifika families, that our families know when they enrol their child at our school, that they are handing over their 'treasure' to someone that they **know** is going to care for their children.

That this 'shared responsibility is taken seriously at our school and that this will not be done alone', that all decisions about their child's learning will be made by a group who have a vested interest in their child (including the family).

