

“The Strategies and Successful Programmes that Accelerate Pacific Island Students Learning – a search for!”

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*“A fia vave oo lou va’a, alo na o’oe, ae a fia tuli mamao le taunu’uga tatou ‘alo’ alo faatasi.
If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together”*

Samoan Proverb

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PURPOSE

To further develop my professional knowledge and to inquire and examine the following questions:

- 1) What are some of the strategies and successful programmes currently operating in N.Z schools that accelerate Pacific Island Students learning?
- 2) How do environmental factors influence / promote learning? In particular my focus is on Pacific Islanders who identify themselves with Samoan ancestry or heritage as this is the predominant Pasifika culture at St Patrick’s School.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The achievement of our Pasifika students in New Zealand schools has been a perennial problem, in particular their “under-achievement.” They are over-represented continually at the bottom end of a wide range of both educational and socio economic indicators.

The Ministry of Education through its publications and Strategic Plans such as:

“Pasifika Education Plan 2013 – 2017”

“Effective Governance: Supporting Pasifika Success. (Information for school board of trustees 2013)” and the Education Review Office with 2013 publications such as:

“Improving Education Outcomes for Pacific Learners”

and National Report Summary “Making Connections for Pacific Learners Success (November 2013) aim to assist schools and communities in raising achievement standards for their Pasifika Students by providing and collating research, best practice, key elements and direction.

If I could sum up my summary and findings in a few words, they would be:

RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY

RATIONALE

The format of my report will continue both on extension of THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY and the FINDINGS from my sabbatical.

Early on, I decided that the approach I would take would be to focus on WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW in our schools and not to overly rely on copious screeds of past research.

Documentation from M.O.E, ERO, T.R.C.C and from the schools I visited make up the bulk of my readings. The purpose of my school visits and the consequent discussions with key staff was to ascertain what specifically “worked for them” in their context.

The list of bullet points in the “Findings” section of this report highlight best practice, successful strategies (for some and possibly not for all) and factors that influence and shaped the strategies and programmes that these New Zealand schools implemented in order to raise Pasifika student achievement, engagement and school responsiveness.

METHODOLOGY

My sabbatical can be broken into the following activities:

- 1) Attend T.R.C.C Course in Wellington 14 – 16 July 2014 “Carrying the Tapa”. A course for Non-Pasifika Teachers teaching Pasifika Students.
- 2) Literature Review:
As stated before in the Rationale section the literature I looked at was specific to the schools I visited (what they would share), plus M.O.E and ERO documentation and notes from the T.R.C.C course I attended.
- 3) Visits to Catholic Schools in Auckland (late July) and Wellington (mid August) which have a high number of Pasifika students and are recognised to have implemented specific programmes aimed at accelerating Pasifika students learning and achievement.
- 4) Visit to Samoa (mid September for 12 days) where I spoke to educationalists, students, families and locals. The purpose was to witness first-hand the culture and environment of Samoa and from this to hopefully further develop my understanding of our Pasifika students (and their families) at St Patrick’s School. In essence, I wanted to see and experience what it is to be a Samoan in Samoa.
- 5) From the above 4 activities, I plan to review existing programmes and strategies that are currently in place at St Patrick’s School and see what changes can be made to enhance them. I will also incorporate some of the effective practices that I witnessed in schools that will further promote the learning and engagement of our Pasifika Students.

FINDINGS

From school visits, interviews, reading and discussions the following points highlight what we need to consider when leading change for our Pasifika students in New Zealand. In essence, they are effective strategies for teaching, community relationships and personal growth.

(Note: These mirror many already known and published strategies and examples of good practice existing in N.Z schools)

- Above all Teacher / Student relationships are caring, positive and genuine (without this we are only window dressing).
- There is a need to know the Pasifika student as a learner which means to also gain a greater understanding of their culture, values, language and identity.
- Take time to get to know and find out about the families of these students.
- Teaching across the school should be consistent and highly effective incorporating quality Teaching as Inquiry methodology.
- The use of quality feedback / feedforward, discussion of ‘next steps’ in context (the use of strong formative assessment strategies).
- Effective classroom management.
- Consistent behavioural expectations across the school.
- Restorative approach and practices.
- Engage with Pasifika students and fanau on both informal and formal basis to ensure their voice is heard.

- Differentiated learning (not a one size fits all) across all curriculum areas.
- Value the language with opportunities to practise (prayer, greetings etc) as well as a demand for correct pronunciation.
- Actively promote the use of Pasifika language in the home for parents as they help their children.
- Seek to enhance relationships with Pasifika parents so that they are at ease in the school setting and have some ownership in determining how they can promote their children's learning.
- Ensure Pasifika students and achievement targets are a priority and are regularly reviewed, monitored and reported on.
- Ensure appropriate professional development is provided not only for Teachers but also for the Board of Trustees.

From my visits to schools in South Auckland and Wellington (all low decile with high percentages of Pasifika students) principals felt that the following were also important in the promotion of student achievement.

- Parental engagement is a priority.
- Teacher Aides of Pasifika descent employed.
- The school includes a Pasifika focus / perspective in its curriculum.
- Fanau meetings are held with Pasifika parents playing a pivotal role in organisation and follow up.
- Professional learning and development is used to up skill teachers in what works for Pasifika learners.
- Teachers' knowledge of cultural practices is developed.
- Pasifika cultures are reflected in the school's physical environment eg. Tapa cloth, artefacts, flags etc.
- The Principal makes connections and builds relationships with Pasifika families by getting out into the playground and community, learning names and getting to know the parents.
- Cultural festivals / performances.
- Parents are comfortable meeting teachers and being in the school grounds.
- School facilities (hall, sports fields) are made available to the community.

IMPLICATIONS

ERO (November 2013) in their National Report Summary highlighted the following from their review of 25 schools in relation to Pasifika learners at NCEA level 2. Five schools who had high levels of success had a clear vision for success. In particular overall strengths were identified in:

- **Leadership** that focused on improvement and with the capacity to bring the school vision to life through aligning school practices to achieve improvements.
- **Review and improvement practices** that relied on high quality achievement data to inform decisions about curriculum, resourcing and the effectiveness of initiatives, enabling refinements to be made as necessary.
- **A curriculum** that was relevant and tailored to the needs and aspirations of Pacific learners and their parents. Teachers were sensitive to the cultural needs and strengths of these students.
- **Relationships** with Pacific families and the community that were capitalised to best support learners and make their learning relevant. Learners were mentored and developed clear educational pathways.

Anne Miles (Principal McAuley High School) presented the following at the TRCC course "Carrying the Tapa." It has particular implications for teachers and is a summary of research findings from Jan Hill and Kaye Hawke who spent five years working in AIMHI schools.

Effective teachers work at having a good relationship with their students.

They:

- Have a positive attitude – they enjoy their job, smile and laugh easily – they share their optimism with their students.
- Believe they can, and are, making a difference to their students.
- Are well prepared with student-centred lessons.
- Are reflective practitioners – they can observe and adapt as necessary.
- See themselves as life-long learners.

- Love their subject.
- Care about their students.
- Have a sense of humour.
- Feel part of a school community and promote pride in the school.
- Understand the worlds of the students.
- Treat the students with respect – use their names.
- Treat all the students fairly.
- Give of themselves (share their world with the students).
- Show patience.
- Persevere and don't give up on the students.
- Keep their word and are consistent.
- Enhance students' self-esteem.
- Make contact with parents.
- Have fun on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

“RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE KEY”

My trip to Samoa allowed me to experience the Samoan people and culture first hand. It was a privilege. On my return to St Patrick's School the relationship with my Samoan students and parents has changed and “went up another level.” The fact that I met with some of their families in Samoa and felt it was important in my role as principal to visit their homeland has made them see our school in a new light. This is their school and we care.

I was hoping to bring back ideas from schools in Samoa to enhance what we have here. The Samoan education system and culture is unique and comparisons with New Zealand are in my opinion tenuous.

Samoa has its own unique issues, in particular high rates of non-attendance at school and their own professional issues such as the implementation of appraisal systems for teaching staff (which is a new concept in Samoa).

An experience I had when I landed at Saleloga Wharf on the island of Savaii on a Tuesday, late morning can perhaps add to this perspective. As I walked off the car ferry I was approached by a young girl (approximately 8 years old) selling drinking coconuts (2 tala each – not a bad price by the way). I asked her why she was not at school and she replied, “no money!”

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