

Report to Annual Meeting 2012

**Educating
Pasifika for
Success**

Educating Pasifika for Success

Mai na matua, mo ki tatou, ki na fanau

Learning from yesterday, living today and hope for tomorrow

Introduction

Pasifika is a collective term used in Aotearoa to refer to people from the Pacific but this collective term, like Pacific Islanders, does detract from considering the nationalities of each Pacific nation. Each Pacific nation comes with their land, their language, their law and their culture which is a part of their heritage. This heritage includes their colonial history and the multiple colonisers, including New Zealand and missionaries who have shaped these island nations culturally, politically and economically as part of the Asia Pacific region.

Aligned with this process the colonisers also brought their foreign policies which eventuated in the relocation of other nationalities into the Pacific mix to fulfil economical projects; Indians to Fiji for the sugar cane industry, Chinese as traders, French to New Caledonia, Guam and Tahiti, Germans, Japanese and Americans to Samoa.

Throughout this peppered history, Pacific nations have managed to retain their indigenous language, their culture and their land despite the educational highway established between Pacific nations and New Zealand. Some students came to boarding schools, others came to attend University and for many, whole families emigrated to Aotearoa for employment and education.

As with most immigrants to another country, the people from Pacific nations came to New Zealand as a much needed labour force to generate an income for themselves and the extended families at home. They began their lives at the bottom of the economic strata in factories and as cleaners to provide for their belief that education is fundamental to success for Pacific People.

2006 Census: “265,974 people identified as Pacific, 7% of total population”

NZ Herald article by Lincoln Tan 2012: “By 2021 for every 100 residents in Auckland, 17 Pacific Island, 12 Māori, 21 Asian and 50 European”

Language

*“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head
If you speak to him in his language that goes to his heart”*

Nelson Mandela

Similarly Professor Spolsky, keynote speaker at the Multilingual Symposium (2011) speaking to the topic Building a multilingual society: creating habitats for language survival explained “...the merits of speaking another language and why bilingualism or multilingualism is good for a society, particularly for children. Extensive research has shown that bilingual individuals do better in many areas of learning and may have some protection from Alzheimer’s.”

When deciding the primary language for Kura Kaupapa Māori, considerable research including reviewing the experiences of language communities experiencing serious decline like Māori, were explored. As well, the teaching practices where bilingualism was a valued attribute for citizenship and rich language experiences was also researched.

It is widely accepted that immersion programmes begun early and continued throughout the child’s learning journey are the most successful options to pursue. But it is equally important for parents to understand the value of using their first language in every possible interaction with their children and the wider family. This

will provide a richer experience with the families' first language, a strong lever for first language retention and a platform to facilitate the acquisition of further languages.

Many examples can be voiced about new immigrant children who discarded their first language in their efforts to learn English to survive in the New Zealand Education System. The second generation began their education with limited first language until the third generation completed the process with no understanding, no knowledge and for the most part inhibited because of their perceived language deficiencies. **How did this inhibition affect their education journey?**

Professor Spolsky at the Multilingual Symposium (2011) spoke of the challenges for Pacific languages in Aotearoa to survive and in particular the languages at risk like Tokelauan, Niuean and Cook Island Māori. The survival of the indigenous languages of these three Pacific nations demands a co-ordinated approach across all sectors. Proponents and promoters of te reo Māori have much to offer this co-ordinated approach.

But what are we doing?

Strengthening languages has got to be built on families working within a community context. It is essential to remember that this whole effort is about traditions, culture and genealogy. Build these links first and the language will flow.

Language decline for Cook Island Māori has been a driver for the establishment of the Cook Island Community Language night classes at Porirua College. Attendance includes Cook Island language learners from as far away as Levin.

Spirituality

First generation immigrants to Aotearoa were clearly bound by the demands of their parents and the greater family. Christian values were paramount, church attendance on Sundays was compulsory even to the extent that playing outside was banned and all children remained inside involved in quiet activities. At school all family members were hallmarks for their parents so that dignity and family pride remained to the fore at all times. Since the first wave of Pacific people have settled into Aotearoa or have passed away, the second and third generation now have a genuine fear that their strong Christian values, learnt from their parents, are being lost. Pacific people come from a faith-based culture with strong Christian values. It is from this vantage that education is viewed. Church schools and early childhood centres attached to the church are seen as the best opportunity. For most Pacific parents the option of faith-based schools, despite the religious denomination, would be their first choice. Aligned with strong Christian values are the parental values and beliefs handed down from grandparents. These values are strongly aligned to Christian values and include respecting your elders and showing respect for adults particularly those in positions of responsibility.

Genealogy

International Labour Organisation Convention (ILO) Convention 169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989, Article 27 number 1 states that *“Education programmes and services for peoples concerned shall be developed and implemented in co-operation with them to address their special needs, and shall incorporate their histories, their knowledge and technologies, their value systems and their social, economic and cultural aspirations.”*

A key genealogical link for Pacific people is the system of chiefly titles. Who is entitled to a title and who is entitled to bestow that title generated interest in the media since Prime Minister John Key was given the title of To'osavili. Chiefly titles that are bestowed by family groups are significant because they connect the title, the name and the family to the land.

This land connection entitles the family to utilise the land and as long as there is a family member resident. But for some Pacific nations the potential to commercialise “under utilised plots” has moved the established leasing system to one of freehold

Changing Pasifika world view

The Pacific population is the fastest naturally growing population in Aotearoa

- By 2026 one in ten people in Aotearoa will be of Pacific descent
- Six out of ten people of Pacific ethnicity are born in New Zealand
- 50% of the seven largest Pacific ethnic groups can speak their language

Pacific people identify with their indigenous origins based on their language, their culture and their nationality. People of the Pacific can have multiple world views through languages and cultures and use these to successfully operate through their spiritual, cultural, political and economic worlds. There is a growing disconnect between young Pacific people and the elders who hold all the treasures of the language and culture. This is the tension between the traditional/conservative and the contemporary.

For many who have emigrated from their homeland, arrival in their new land is the slice in time that remains with them for the rest of their existence and will not change until they revisit their homeland. For the Pacific people based in the island nations they have evolved linguistically and socially. Hindi spoken in Fiji is Hindi of a yester year just as the conservative mode of dress practised here in New Zealand is not the case in Samoa.

Education

The role of education is to provide experiences for children that are as close to their area of development as possible because if the experiences are too distant from the child's cultural orientation then the child will fail to make the necessary connections and will not develop as fast as expected. Learning new tasks that are culturally related and recognisable will allow for controlled risk taking, experimentation and relaxed learning

The role of the teacher should involve increased knowledge and understanding of the child and their family, the positions of the individuals in the family and the extended family network. Teachers are regarded with the utmost respect by Pasifika parents and children alike so that even when making a complaint about a legitimate concern, parents will couch this concern with an introductory apology before continuing with the substance of the concern.

Pasifika people want the best for their children and young people in all areas and walks of life to ensure that they contribute to the family, the church and the communities. Respect and valuing elders and people in positions of leadership means that the family is at all times totally engaged in the education of their children

Dr Diane Mara thinks that Pasifika ECE services are similar to Montessori and Steiner services in that there is an emphasis on spiritual growth and development of children, and also similar to Te Kōhanga Reo because they exist to foster and promote Pasifika languages and cultural values so that the children know who they are and have their identities affirmed

Students develop the ability, confidence and motivation to succeed academically when they participate competently as a result of having developed a secure sense of identity and knowledge that their voice will be heard and respected within their learning environment. They must feel a sense of ownership for the learning that goes on in their learning community.

Developing the use of cultural lens

Exploring culturally preferred tools offers multiple entries from which family could work in terms of teaching and learning for Pasifika children. The prior knowledge of the family and the new knowledge of the child can be integrated so that together they are able to become a community of collective learners. Educating Pasifika for Success should provide shared skills needed for life in Aotearoa, opportunities to become fluent in their language; to utilise their culture; to learn about themselves and their environment

Building on the premise that culture and identity is a consistent feature in Pasifika narratives both past and present. A cultural lens is an analytical tool that provides culturally sanctioned ways of viewing situations that leads towards agreed cultural outcomes. When considering any project, this tool is essential to ensure that a Pasifika cultural lens is the focus for the following directed questions.

- What is the point of difference in this project?
- What is the added value in this project?
- How can we improve our Pasifika evidence base around this project?
- If culture and identity are important for the development of Pasifika children then how are culture and identity incorporated into these projects?

What needs to happen?

International Labour Organisation Convention (ILO) Convention 169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989, Article 2 number 2b, 2c states that

“Actions shall include measures for:

2b promoting the full realisation of the social, economic and cultural rights of these people with respect for their social and cultural identity, their customs and traditions and their institutions

2c assisting the members of the peoples concerned to eliminate socio-economic gaps that may exist between indigenous and other members...in a manner compatible with their aspirations”

Ensure that you are totally prepared before venturing on this journey but be aware that you will not be travelling alone. Preparation will involve seeking knowledge about the Pacific students in your classroom including their family, their place in the family, the roles of the family members, the elders and/or church leaders for the separate Pacific nations and their expectations of you with this very elevated position as the teacher of their child. Don't be deterred, everyone will be in the same position.

Language

Every Pasifika child must know their genealogy.

I am Samoan, I am Cook Island, I am Tokelauan, I am Niuean, I am from Kiribati. I am Tuvaluan, I am Tongan, I am Fijian, I am Tahitian, I am from New Caledonia or a mixture of these including Māori and European and having established that then they have a right to have their language or languages.

The changing Pacific world view

A child of a Pacific nation is nothing like the images of yesteryear. They are contemporary, innovative and creative and usually urbanised. Their families will be mainly highly educated white collar workers from mixed marriages. And they want the same good education for their children along with those Pacific/Christian values bound up in language and identity.

The need to know the intricate family structures, the importance of the church and community within the family and engaging parents in all educational deliberations will go a long way to educating Pasifika for success.

How will this happen?

A programme *Carrying the Tapa* is available through the Teacher Refresher Course to provide non Pacific teachers with skills to deal with Pacific students. This course will also be registered with the Centre for Excellence from which a process of dissemination will be activated.

Other programmes focused on specific Pacific nations will be developed and rolled out in a similar fashion through the Centre for Excellence.

Facilitators in the first instance will come from Komiti Pasifika in Wellington so that the programmes can be trialled before dissemination to the wider education communities

Conclusion

From my perspective as a child of a Pacific Nation I have a question.

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Samoan child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Tongan child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Cook Island child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Tokelauan child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Fijian child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Niuean child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Tuvaluan child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Kiribati child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the Tahitian child?

Where are the education initiatives that respond to me, the New Caledonian child?

And I don't mean the statistical data required for government targets. I mean the programmes that are about me, consulted and developed with me in mind and provided in and through my home language. I mean the programmes that are provided by teachers that know me and see me this child of the Pacific

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Recommendations

1. That the Report 'Educating Pasifika for Success' is received.
2. That the Report 'Educating Pasifika for Success' is adopted.