O le Tautai Matapalapala: Leadership strategies for supporting Pasifika students in New Zealand schools

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Abstract
This article addresses effective school leaders so that leaders may navigate robust, vigorous and well-thought through changes and supports in schools to raise the engagement and achievement of Pasifika learners. From a Pasifika perspective, a “true leader” in education is an effective leader, a leader with high integrity (alolaia) and standing, who is driven by culturally responsive principles, values, aspirations and world views of the students. Such a leader utilizes a personal humanitarian approach with the self-belief, courage, determination and perseverance to wholeheartedly take students from where they are currently at in learning, to where they need to be. This research used Talanoa methodology to explore the perceptions of four principals on supporting Pasifika students in primary and secondary New Zealand schools. This research found a significant need for effective leadership by principals to navigate educational changes that genuinely make a difference to unlock doors of opportunities in every school to raise achievement and wellbeing for all Pasifika learners.

Keywords: Pasifika; schooling; leadership; supporting achievement; culturally appropriate practices

Introduction
It is well-established that effective education leaders change the educational outcomes for low achieving students (Bishop, 2011; Fletcher & Nicholas, 2016; Lashway, 2006; Macfarlane, 2010; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). In Aotearoa New Zealand such leaders are imperative for reversing the educational underachievement of Pasifika students (Robinson, et al., 2009). Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd report on an Education Review Office (ERO, 2012) finding that leadership is a critical aspect of developing an effective school with ongoing support for student achievement. The principal can be one of the most important and influential people in the school because his/her leadership shapes the school’s learning climate, the level of the relationship between staff, and teacher morale (Korkmaz, 2007).

Bishop (2011) states a number of characteristics needed for effective leaders to reduce educational disparities, including the ability to: establish and develop specific measurable goals; promote and support pedagogic reform; redesign the institutional and organisational framework; develop the capacity of people and systems; and take ownership of the programme. While these characteristics are favourable in leading the learning for Pasifika students in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is essential to also incorporate traditional Pasifika leadership qualities embedded within cultural values, such as fa’amaoni (integrity), alofa (love), tautua (service), fetausia’i (reciprocity) fa’aleagaga (spirituality), fa’aaloalo (respect) ta’itaiga’ (leadership) and fa’asinomaga (belonging). The valuing, utilization and weaving of these qualities into educational leadership can result in effective leaders who can navigate educational changes for the betterment of Pasifika students’ learning and achievement.

Literature

The New Zealand context
Since 2009, the Government has called for a much more active and urgent focus on lifting school performance for Pasifika students (MoE, 2014). Such identification and prioritizing of Pasifika achievement is critical
for the economic future and wellbeing of Aotearoa New Zealand (Fletcher, Parkhill, Fa’afoi, Taleni & O’Regan, 2009; Ministry of Education, 2009, 2014; Robinson & Timperley, 2004). Currently, alongside Māori and children from low socio-economic backgrounds, the Government positions Pasifika students’ educational achievement as a key priority area (MoE, 2015). Further, schools have been urged to recognise the cultural capital and funds of knowledge that students bring with them to the learning environment (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992), and to create culturally appropriate programmes for different Pasifika groups, their identities, languages and cultures (ERO, 2012).

The Pasifika Education Plan (PEP) 2013-2017 (MoE, 2012) aims to ensure educational achievement for all Pasifika students - with the inclusion and participation of students, families, communities, school leaders and staff, and MoE participating partners (MoE, 2012). It acknowledges Pasifika families’ and communities’ aspirations for their children to achieve well academically without losing their identities, languages and cultures. Pasifika learners’ parents, families and communities have strong educational aspirations for their children. These aspirations include educators contributing to improving their learning outcomes.

**Effective leadership**

The focus on effective leadership in New Zealand, in part, stems from the challenging and continuing underachievement plight of Māori and Pasifika students in the education system (Allen, Taleni & Robertson 2009; Harris, 2009). Research findings support the influence of high quality leadership on all students’ increased engagement and achievement at school (Bishop & Berryman, 2010, 2012) and this has become the catalyst for changing Māori and Pasifika students’ education performance. For example, the Te Kotahitanga project emphasized the importance of educational leadership that is committed to improving Māori achievement with explicit academic goals for stable student-centred vision, as influential for creating effective changes in schools and reducing educational disparities for Māori learners (Bishop, 2011). This is because principals are in a position to foster greater collaboration among teachers, which often leads to improvements in teachers’ instructional practices. In turn, these improvements enhance student learning.

From a Western perspective, effective school leadership is integral to achieving the vision and goals of a school and creating a positive learning culture for learners, staff and the school community (Education Review Office, 2012). Further, due to the nature of organisational learning in schools (Leithwood & Louis, 1998) and professional learning communities (Louis & Kruse, 1995; Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996; Marks, Louis & Printy, 2000; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; Silins, Mulford, Zarins & Bishop, 2000), strong successful leadership has the capacity to influence and drive change – to support and sustain the performance of staff, teachers and students.

Pasifika students’ performance in Aotearoa New Zealand education continues to face a potential crisis. For example, Pasifika students in New Zealand are more highly represented as underachieving in reading (Chamberlain, 2008, 2014). Because of this, it will take true leaders in education to lead the voyage to safe destinations. A safe destination for Pasifika achievement is when the education system successfully achieves its PEP vision for Pasifika learners: “five out of five Pasifika learners, participating, engaging and achieving in education, secure in their identities and contributing fully to Aotearoa New Zealand’s social, cultural and economic wellbeing” (MoE, 2012, p. 1).

**Methodology**

Phenomenology emphasises the importance of personal perspective and interpretation within a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity. The approach in this research was to “illuminate the specific, to
identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in situation” (Lester, 1999, p. 1). It is this understanding of the actors’ perceptions about certain phenomena that give a rich data depth to the research. In this study, it is the actors’ points of view that matter, their consciousness about the meanings they have regarding the school supports needed to enhance Pasifika students’ learning.

The utilization of Pasifika “Talanoa” research (Vaioleti, 2006) captures the essence of Pasifika epistemology as its foundation, as a way of developing “who” matters in the research, “what” matters, and the “how” process – the methods used to carry it out. Talanoa research provides a “personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations” (Vaioleti, 2006, p.1).

Talanoa is highly recommended by Pasifika researchers as a safe recognised methodology that is culturally appropriate (Vaioleti, 2006). It is a conversation, a talk, an exchange of ideas or thinking, whether formal or informal, and usually happens in face to face situations where rich contextual information surfaces as co-constructed stories. It allows people to engage in social conversation which leads to critical discussions and knowledge creation, and is fundamental to this study. Talanoa is also a form of “Lagaga” (weaving of knowledge) which is built or woven from these ideas, to form a more constructed and meaningful discourse.

Insider researcher
Qualitative researchers are entwined in their research in ways that can be close and deeply meaningful. As first author, my research investigation was guided and supported by the three co-authors who supervised my Master’s thesis from which this article evolves. It is important to understand this and, for my part, to be clear about my insider position as a prominent person in the “Pasifika Success Talanoa project” PSTP – developing, delivering and monitoring the project. Further, as a Samoan researcher, my practices had to be authentic to me. The “outsider” position would not have worked for me in this study. Such a distant research role would have run counter to all the lived experiences and cultural values, beliefs and practices that are “me”. The importance for me to be seen an insider (referred to as “kanohi kitea” (Macfarlane et al., 2014)) was the essence of researcher well-being.

The participants
Four school principals – Filipo, Iosefa, Lopati and Tina - were invited to participate in my study as they had been undertaking sustained professional development on supporting Pasifika students and they articulated a passion to make a difference for Pasifika learners. They had been engaged in the Pasifika Success Talanoa Project (PSTP) funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Education since its beginning and, as such, they knew me and I knew them. Over the four years of this project, the motivation and engagement of all Pasifika learners in their schools was clearly visible. At one of the secondary schools, for example, one hundred percent of their Pasifika students were successful in their national school examinations (Education Gazette, 2015). My close relationship with each principal over the years of many professional engagements was a great advantage when inviting them as key participants for this study. I had facilitated ongoing professional development in supporting Pasifika learners and approached the principals after in-depth observations and follow-up professional development discussions on their school sites.

The four schools had the following percentages of Pasifika students: 7.8 percent, 19.9 percent, 21.3 percent and 25.6 percent. The four school leaders had demonstrated to me their real commitment to the PSTP, and their ability to culturally engage with Pasifika students, families and communities. I viewed them as representatives of the many effective principals I had been working with around the country on this kaupapa (plan of work) of raising Pasifika engagement and achievement. For the principals, they were familiar with the work and could participate with confidence that their thoughts were of great value. For me, the principals had lived through transformation and were putting in place positive supports for their students.
This research sought to clarify the following question: What are the supports that effective school leaders use in establishing culturally responsive practices in New Zealand schools for the successful engagement and achievement of Pasifika students? It was perfectly clear to me that all that was left to do was to have a Talanoa with each Principal. I needed to explore their understandings and meanings related to what they had learned over the past few years, to what they are doing now.

**Data gathering**

Each of the four principals was involved in a one-to-one, audio-recorded, semi-structured interview with me during the school day, conducted in a room away from distractions and interruptions. A set of open-ended, free flowing and exploratory questions was developed, with special attention given to questions related to the research question, using natural and familiar language, avoiding loaded questions, and using probes to draw the conversation towards the research question (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

The questions needed to allow participants to explain their meanings about effective supports in schools to allow Pasifika students to engage and achieve, and from the perspective of school leadership. The interview was very close to the format of a Talanoa method of gathering data (Vaioleti, 2006) and, although it was set out as a one-to-one conversation, it was conducted in a true manner and in the spirit of a Talanoa process, where the participant and interviewer freely shared the same role.

**Data analysis**

Each audio-taped principal interview was transcribed. The participants were sent copies of their transcripts to confirm that they were an accurate reflection of their words and no alterations resulted. Transcripts were then analysed according to discourse analysis; in particular, the qualitative coding system developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) was implemented. Two sequential coding systems, open and axial coding, were completed to establish concepts (or themes) and categories (or sub-themes). Open coding is the process for breaking down the data into first level searching for concepts (larger theme type notions), and then second level which identifies categories (smaller sub-themes to the concept). Researchers read and repeatedly reread the interview scripts to identify and highlight concepts and then the categories.

This coding is concentrated on defining concepts and categories, to endorse the identification of concepts and categories, to ensure they accurately illustrate the participants’ responses. The analyses sought to investigate the relationships and connections between the open coded concepts and categories. When doing this, it may be that you ask the questions: What conditions caused or influenced concepts and categories? What is/was the social/political context? What are the associated effects or consequences? After open coding, I completed axial coding to identify the concepts and categories for their inter-relationships and connections.

**Findings and discussion**

Seven major concepts analysed and identified from the principals’ Talanoa provide strong supports for developing effective learning environments where Pasifika learners are engaged, achieve educational success and can fulfil their aspirations. The key concepts identified in this section were intrinsically and extrinsically woven into the whole school life. These concepts, some with sub-categories, are as follows:

- building dynamic relationships with students and families (cultural connection, knowing, caring);
- understanding Pasifika cultural worldviews (being proactive, increase cultural capacity, being a learner);
- effective use of achievement data information;
- strengthening culturally responsive leadership;
- creating robust community engagement;
set high expectations for success and achievement;
- engaging in motivational professional development.

**Concept 1: Building dynamic relationships with students and families**

**Centrality of relationships**

Building rich, strong relationships is central to providing a warm, accepting and welcoming learning environment for Pasifika students. The principals talked directly and indirectly about the centrality of forming relationships with the community as crucial for their students’ learning and wellbeing:

> The one that is of utmost importance is my personal relationship with all of those families, in that if I see out in the car park a taxi van or a big Samoan van out there my automatic reaction is “get out there and go and talk to those people” or if they are in the school waiting to see another staff member, I sit down beside them and strike up a conversation. (Iosefa, 2015)

**Cultural connection**

The way principals talked about relationships showed an understanding about the diversity of children and families in their local communities, the importance of gaining a deep understanding of every child and their family’s culture, and the need to make meaningful connections within the community. Such cultural bonding is deeply embedded in the work of a number of New Zealand academics and researchers, for example, Bishop and colleagues (Berryman & Bishop, 2011, Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Bishop and Glynn, 1999); and Macfarlane and colleagues (Glynn, Cavanagh, Macfarlane, A., & Macfarlane, S., 2011; Macfarlane, A. & Macfarlane, S., 2016).

In this study the principals realized that building strong relationships requires their cultural connection with students, families and community:

> And, actually, the heart that I would share with you is really about my personal journey into an understanding about wanting to be a principal who can stand in a particular place in a cultural connection where our Pasifika families can have a relationship where they feel that I get them, I understand where they are, I understand where they are coming from, I can greet them in their language. (Iosefa, 2015)

Iosefa clearly signals relationships at the heart of leadership practice, with a dedication to honouring and respecting the students, families and community. It was important that families knew that the principal understood them.

For Tina, cultural connection was very much tied up with changing assumptions and world-views:

> Often people’s assumptions don’t shift until they really engage with the community…. So, when you engage with a genuine relationship with Pasifika people, and you want to engage properly… you can’t but have your world view shifted.

**Knowing**

So often, the principals referred to knowing their students and families as critical to building effective relationships. Lopati emphasized this, in a way that has richness within the relationship: “It’s about being able to form a relationship, a learning relationship with the child and then be able to scaffold their learning to improve their achievement.” In other words, relationships matter, and “In order to teach you, I must know you” (Allen, Taleni & Robertson, 2009, p. 47). This positioning by the principals is supported by research illustrating the important role of teacher–child relationships and teacher–family relationships as a priority by teachers in schools (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Hamre & Pianta, 2001).
Caring
Knowing the students and their families was very much linked to “caring” as essential to relationship building: “Embrace them and show that you care and are interested” (Filipo, 2015). Lopati emphasizes that knowing the child and his family means that:

*I suppose just getting to know people and that culture of care, so I try and get to know as many students as I can and their families and to make school a welcoming and happy place... it’s really based around a culture of care.*

Knowing his students and families showed that he cared about them and their learning, and with this in place he could help students to achieve at school. Such relationships are, in fact, a prerequisite to learning. In support of the principals’ thoughts about care in relationships, research (see, for example, Jensen, 2009; Macfarlane, 2010) has reiterated the importance of teachers building caring, responsive and nurturing relationships with children that involve close and meaningful connections with families and home life.

Key to the effective engagement of Pasifika parents and communities in this revisioned approach to inclusive education, are the relationships that must be fostered amongst all partners. The literature that discusses how relationships can best be fostered explores issues around communication, responsibility and roles (see, for example, Fletcher, Parkhill, Taleni, Fa’afoi & O’Regan, 2009; Fullan, 2007). To experience positive relationships with your students you need to take the time to get to know them and build connections. By knowing your students well, you can understand their interests and plan learning experiences that reflect these interests. Knowing your students well helps you identify the best approaches to help them learn.

Concept 2: Understanding Pasifika cultural worldviews
The principals were very clear about their need to understand Pasifika worldviews and to show an interest in their students’ cultures in a practical and meaningful way.

Being proactive
When Pasifika aiga (family/families) “see” principals being actively involved in learning about their students’ culture and language, they feel safe and secure to step up in a participatory role in the school environment:

*It’s all very well to stand at the gate or be in the playground and wave, our Pasifika families will smile and wave but generally they won’t be proactive and approach you, so it is up to you to be pro-active and approach them, embrace them and show that you care and are interested.*

(Filipo, 2015)

In this sense, knowing Pasifika worldview is about being a strong networker who is out there making connection with the school community. What these principals are saying is to get out there, out of the principal’s office, out of the school grounds, into the school car park and onto the street where they can use the opportunity to talk with families and be proactive in understanding Pasifika worldviews that are embedded in their identities, languages and cultures. These opportunities provide a platform for school principals and teachers to launch their work in finding out about students’ learning needs, weaknesses, limitations, strengths and aspirations. It is this understanding that opens principals’ hearts to the unique cultural values and principles of Pasifika students that drives learning and raises engagement and achievement. This aligns with the work of Fletcher, Grimley, Greenwood and Parkhill (2011).

Increase cultural capacity
Increasing your cultural capacity is about being fully engaged in learning about the culture of your students and changing the way you “look” at different worldviews (Allen, Taleni & Robertson, 2009; Macfarlane, A. & Macfarlane, S., 2016).
A massive part of it is shifting assumptions, but firstly people have to be aware that they have those assumptions, because your world view is how you think things are... often people’s assumptions don’t shift until they are actually engaged with the community. (Tina, 2015)

The principals understood the value of “looking” and exploring the unique learning experiences that students contribute to learning – to increase their cultural competence and confidence.

When you are a Pālagi principal you have to take off your Pālagi glasses and see the experience that Pasifika kids are bringing to school with them and understand where those kids are coming from. (Iosefa, 2015)

Using different lenses to gain knowledge and understanding of Pasifika student worldviews requires principals to dig deep in their thinking and cast their nets into deeper waters in order to find true pearls at the heart of the ocean, in other words – the consciousness of the teacher. This metaphor is significant for Pasifika peoples as it implies purpose, collaboration, harvesting and engaging in endeavours that sustain people.

Casting the net deeper has been a harvest of pearls for me. What I will say is when you cast the net deeper you find the pearls and some of that is the relationship that you create with your families, with your kids (which is something I will take with me for the rest of my life, and with the community). (Iosefa, 2015)

Harvesting pearls is a complicated and challenging task, only achieved with courage and perseverance to “cast the net into deeper waters.” In a sense, Iosefa’s quote illustrates how pearls are at the heart of love and service for students.

When teachers and principals accomplish pearl harvest, they demonstrate obligation and commitment to Pasifika education. Their desire to cast their nets deeper is a stepping up with a genuine willingness to explore and learn about Pasifika students’ cultural worldviews as a support to implement effective strategies and approaches to raise Pasifika student engagement and achievement.

As part of their professional development, two of my participant principals took part in the Pasifika Education Initiative Samoa Malaga (trip) – a two week visit to Samoa to experience Samoan culture that I organize bi-annually. Lopati spoke about how his 2013 Samoa Malaga influenced and impacted on his learning as a principal of Pasifika students:

Just the fact of going to Samoa, it gives you a chance to really understand the different culture and to really understand to a degree all the nuances of that culture and it enables you to see things through a different cultural lens and to see the qualities particularly of our Samoan students that perhaps sometimes in our education system we don’t see, like the Samoan values of respect and service especially, also the place of religion in the culture and it really opened my eyes that we really have got to get to know the learner as a person rather than as just a learner.

Coming to understand Pasifika learners can be complex and challenging because of the diverse nature of Pasifika worldviews and cultural backgrounds, particularly in our increasingly multicultural classrooms (Allen, Taleni & Robertson, 2009). From my own cultural and personal experiences, I can understand how this can be for principals in relation to the vitality and value of knowing and understanding Pasifika learners’ worldviews.

Secondly, Lopati talked about the real understanding that comes from being in Samoa, immersed in his students’ “home” culture and increasing his cultural capacity. Samoa Malaga provided him an accessible way to learn more about students’ cultural capital and funds of knowledge (Bourdieu, 1984) - that must be nurtured, cherished and attended to if principals genuinely desire to make a difference for students.
Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital suggests that if a school can accommodate and affirm the cultural values, principles, beliefs and attitudes of its students, it is more likely that the school will be able to make a difference to the students’ learning and achievement. The acknowledgement and utilization of students’ cultural capital in boosting academic achievement is shaped by the family’s and the school’s social and cultural resources.

**Being a learner**

Principals and teachers are able to benefit from realizing the importance of “being a learner themselves” when it comes to learning about their students’ culture. There is power that comes from the reversal of role between students and teachers. The students can feel empowered by the fact that their teachers are learners themselves and committed to learning their culture.

Iosefa talked about the rewards when being with the student and, indirectly, about being a learner:

> I see how taking my time for that boy to be given the experience, how it has enriched his life and how that has enriched my life because of just taking the time and making the effort to work alongside him, and for his family that was very special.

In a different way, Tina talked indirectly about how empathy empowers the learner to learn. She discussed how uncomfortable it was for her knowing that some Pasifika parents lacked confidence to come into the school setting to meet their child’s teacher and discuss any issues. She realised that not all teachers showed empathy towards the Pasifika parents’ reticence in coming forward about their concerns.

As categories in my analysis of the principals’ voices related to Pasifika cultural worldviews, the essence of being proactive, increasing cultural capacity, and being a learner are at the leading edge for school leaders to implement culturally responsive practices in their schools. Pasifika students have identities - a Samoan student is always Samoan, a Tongan student always Tongan, and so on. What is important is being secure in one’s identity. As leaders of Pasifika students, understanding students’ identities is central to valuing students’ cultural worldviews. Such valuing is an anchor of a va’a (canoe/boat) - just as our personal identities keep us grounded and intact.

**Concept 3: Effective use of achievement data information**

**Need for data**

The principals reflected on the importance of having student achievement data as paramount and at the forefront of teaching and learning.

> We insist that a family comes with their child to be interviewed in our school, so we start with a knowledge base. We don’t want this child that comes to us to be a stranger, so we start with gathering data from the school that sent that child to us. (Filipo, 2015)

Parent and family involvement and contributions (i.e., sharing their aspirations and knowledge) are essential to developing culturally responsive and effective school programmes.

**Programme planning**

While the principals saw the true value of information provided by data to assist in finding out the students’ learning needs, they were most concerned about teachers’ ability to design their programmes and the kinds of support required, appropriate to the students’ needs. The following quote signposts these concerns:

> So then we have a great pool of data, we then have the opportunity to plan what kind of class that child is going to go into. The Asttle data gives us indications of what the gaps are for
that child. We will be able to plan what sort of extra support that child is going to need - will that child require extra ESOL assistance, will that child be eligible for the extra Ministry of Education Migrant Assistant funding that schools can apply for? (Iosefa, 2015)

Principals also put emphasis on data collection as a way to monitor and review ongoing student progress, where teachers were expected to modify programmes for learners who were underachieving in the curriculum. The monitoring system allowed for programme modifications to ensure student progress throughout the year:

We have targets for Pasifika children who are underachieving in the curriculum and we get teachers to reflect on how those children are progressing throughout the year. (Iosefa, 2015)

Part of the monitoring and review strategy for Pasifika students is the involvement of parents and families in three-way Talanoa:

Within our three-way interviews or learning conferences we put a much bigger onus on the children, talking to their parents about where they are in their learning and whānau engagement. This year we had two whānau activities with our Pasifika families and we also had a representative as far as our clusters go. So a combination of all of those things because it is really based around highly effective teaching and high expectations for our Pasifika children. (Filipo, 2015)

Integral to the monitoring approach is the involvement of parents in their contribution to school programmes.

**Concept 4: Strengthening culturally responsive leadership practices (CRLP)**

Culturally responsive leadership interacts with the previous three concepts: building relationships; Pasifika world view; and assessment data information. The principals in this study valued the importance of CRLP for the benefit of Pasifika students’ learning.

**Leadership support**

The importance of leadership support cannot be overstated, as it means that Pālagi school leaders could implement culturally responsive practices into their schools. Iosefa’s quote below acknowledged the absolute value of Pasifika advice in being able to be a culturally responsive leader:

The role that Pasifika educators play, I could not have done my job here without that because Pālagi principals need good advice. Along with that, we have been very fortunate to have excellent Pasifika representatives on our Board of Trustees, we are very fortunate for that.

**Parents and families**

Responsive leadership practice was spoken about in the way parents and families’ Talanoa (meetings) with teachers have been adapted and structured in culturally appropriate ways:

One of the things that we have done which we started last year which has been extremely useful is that we have restructured the way the children are organised in their whānau groups in school which has made it much easier to create that relationship between the whānau tutor and the family and we have also gotten rid of the old report nights. Instead parents are invited to come into the school for the afternoon, they are given delicious food while they are sitting there waiting, they are entertained by the Pasifika students and then the parents are given a big slot of time where they can have really in-depth conversations about success. (Iosefa, 2015)
Leadership effectiveness

School leaders of Pasifika students are encouraged, through the use of the “cast your net into deeper waters” metaphor, to extend and deepen their thinking, to question the causes of disengagement and underachievement, and to explore effective culturally responsive pedagogies. Tina encapsulated the need to extend and deepen her thinking when she asked questions:

*So a huge part of the journey is shifting of assumptions, so the programmes that we have put in place... was to replicate a really intensive ongoing programme for staff that is culturally responsive... it adds a number of arms. It looks at how our processes are culturally responsive. How’s our curriculum and our pedagogy culturally responsive? How’s our engagement with the community and how the community communicates with us, culturally responsive? And how do we bring all those things together to create a different experience for the young Pasifika people in our school?*

Tina knew her role as a school leader had a critical part to play in the process of leading learning and change for better Pasifika learners’ outcomes. Her thoughtfulness towards all Pasifika people provided a strong role model for the teachers in her school. Also, she led a group of principals in a local cluster group of schools, on strategies to engage and support Pasifika students in their learning and motivation to succeed.

**Concept 5: Creating robust community engagement**

As previously threaded throughout my writing, community involvement is a must within the school, as a key to Pasifika students enjoying being at school and achieving. This cannot be overstated.

Positive connection

The power of a positive connection between school and community is undeniable, and needs to be initiated by school leaders.

*...developing relationships, getting parents into school, providing opportunities where they can come in and we can develop that relationship around the three-legged stool - community, school and family.* (Filipo, 2015)

Iosefa talked further about the positive influence of strong connections made with parents and families, as crucial in promoting the school to the community:

*And when the parents start to develop those connections, those connections go in concentric rings, because one of the things that has been a point of learning for me is the fact that those rings go outwards and families are talking to other families, and people will walk in off the street and have said, “We have heard this is a good school for Samoan kids and we want to bring our kids to your school.”*

In a different way, Filipo referred to key messages in the Pasifika Education Plan – mainly that principals lead the way for staff and school to connect with families and community for their engagement in the learning and achievement of their children. He reminded educators about their obligation to students, families and communities:

*It is about putting learners, families and communities at the centre of what we do, which I think comes through in the Pasifika Education Plan. It is a moral imperative ... the whole staff have that moral obligation as well.*

Building and strengthening relationships between school and community can foster students’ ongoing desire and commitment for their improvement in learning.
Effective principals encourage the voice of parents and community in the development of the school curriculum, teaching programmes and units of work. Signposted learning power comes from effective engagement with Pasifika families and community. At times, the community and families came into the school willing to offer and share their cultural expertise and experiences, contributing to staff professional development. In this regard, this school principal – along with Iosefa, Filipo and Lopati - has learned a great deal from the manner in which school community and parents’ fono (meetings) were conducted. They have experienced the true essence of fa’a-Pasifika (Pasifika ways of doing things) in the way they participated and contributed in the meetings.

**Concept 6: Setting high expectations for success and achievement**

School principals’ high educational expectations can result in Pasifika students reaching their full potential.

**Recipe for success**

The principals perceived that being Pasifika and belonging to Pasifika culture is a recipe for success not failure.

*So by virtue of the fact that a child in our school is Samoan, I will say to a child, “you’re Samoan and Samoans are high achievers so there is no excuse for you.” There is no excuse for you to do this or that or miss a class or behave like this or whatever that is going to contribute to failure.* (Iosefa, 2015)

*I always say in our school Samoan students are the top students, so what are you doing? So that is establishing an understanding on the part of the kids that they are expected to be a success.* (Filipo, 2015)

It was of interest that both Iosefa and Filipo alluded to successful Pasifika student role models to motivate and encourage their students as key to the recipe for success idea. In other words, “I have high expectations for you to succeed. There have been successful Samoan students before you. You can do it too.” This strategy of having high expectation for Pasifika students proved to be motivating and successful for many Pasifika students.

**Motivated school leaders**

Dedicated and motivated school leaders always find ways to get their messages across to students. Principals have an obligation to provide motivation for teachers, reminding staff of the value of service.

*...and I guess the other thing is it comes back to that proverb “O le ala i le pule o le tautua, the pathway to leadership is through service” - so the idea of service ... of being there to serve my community, what motivates me, that motivates me.* (Iosefa, 2015)

Further, motivated principals have a “sense of belief” in their students - that they will succeed in everything they put their minds and efforts to, as expressed by Tina: “You see the potential and you want that potential fulfilled, you know, and it’s, while we’re doing it within our little environment here in the school.” Self-belief and recognition of students’ potential as major motivation in their leadership are key. There was clearly a determination to help these students to reach their full potential.

In a different vein, but still in line with motivated leadership, Tina commented on what drives them to be highly motivated:

*So, for me, it’s a really strong social justice issue that we’ve got young people in our schools, young people in our nation and if they’re not being liberated to reach their full potential it’s a sadness for our nation as well as a sadness for our schools and a sadness for those young...*
people. It’s also something about the Pasifika community itself is a really beautiful community to work with, it’s something about the values and the spirit in the community itself, it’s a really uplifting engagement.

Tina’s words are very much aligned with critical theory and the centrality of emancipation of the oppressed (Freire, 1970).

Success a priority
Having high expectations for students to perform and achieve success is a priority for school principals and staff. Initiating conversations everywhere around the school about achievement is all part of setting high expectations for success.

There have been times when some of our kids have resented that and they haven’t liked the pressure that I have put them under. Do I apologize for that? No, not one little bit because if I don’t do that, then who will? And once again when I see a young Pasifika student, I do not see all the excuses and barriers that might suggest that they are not going to be successful, I only see the fact that they can be the best and I want that for them and their families. (Iosefa, 2015)

Providing the best possible education for students with plenty of opportunities, strategies and resources helps students achieve and reach their full potential.

We have an open mind-set so we believe all children can be successful and they deserve the best possible education in order to reach their full potential, and it is about not stereo-typing children as they are working and expectations are not lowered to fit their ethnicity. (Iosefa, 2015)

Personal and professional philosophy
Effective principals are driven by their own strong professional and personal philosophical beliefs about what drives success for their students. The principals articulated the importance of “setting high expectations” for student success and achievement, that being Pasifika is a “recipe for success” not a recipe for failure. What success looks like and feels like is important for Pasifika students’ ongoing drive and motivation for learning. Pasifika community leaders voiced their support from their Pasifika cultural perspective along with a strong reminder to educators and professionals about Pasifika parents and families’ aspirations for their children to perform well academically without losing their identities, languages and cultures in the process of learning.

Concept 7: Engaging in motivational professional development
Professional development to build teachers’ cultural capacity and capability can result in gaining and developing their competence and confidence. Knowing the learners is a key principle of good practice.

Culturally responsive practice

Pedagogy
A strong emphasis on implementing effective pedagogy for Pasifika students, including the principle of “knowing the learners” we teach was signalled by Lopati:

We have quite a clear expectation of what effective pedagogy looks like at our school which includes quite an emphasis on getting to know the learner as a person and know their learning needs and it has quite an emphasis on scaffolding learning.

Teaching as inquiry
A strong message that came through was the emphasis on “teaching as inquiry” where teachers have the opportunity to lead their own professional inquiry on ways to improve practice:
Another thing we do is we have quite a strong teacher as inquiry process where teachers have to identify children who are not achieving as well as they can and reflect on their own teaching in regards to it and each of those groups needs to include Pasifika children. (Lopati, 2015)

Prior knowledge
The role of professional development led by effective principals was to work with prior knowledge to shift teachers’ assumptions, perceptions and power – to understand that Pasifika students have their baskets of cultural capital.

We have looked at some school wide professional learning and development with strategies that teachers can use to help with Pasifika students especially as far as collecting context and activating prior knowledge. We spend quite a lot of time in staff meetings with the whole staff unpacking those things and really getting down deep into things like text selection, reading and activating prior knowledge. (Filipo, 2015)

Tina spoke with passion and intensity about shifting assumptions:

...and that was hugely about shifting peoples’ assumptions about how things are done, and why they should be done, and starting to understand, knowing what you don’t know.

Conclusion
This voyage has netted answers to my major research question - What supports do effective school leaders use when establishing culturally responsive practices in New Zealand schools for the successful engagement and achievement of Pasifika students? Seven key supports scaffold the foundation for effective principalship within the overall “umbrella” commitment to the Pasifika Education Plan:

1. Building dynamic relationships with students and families;
2. Understanding Pasifika cultural worldviews;
3. Effective use of achievement data information;
4. Strengthening culturally responsive leadership;
5. Creating robust community engagement;
6. Setting high expectations for success and achievement;
7. Engaging in motivational professional development.

Further, a range of categories were analysed and interpreted, as integral to each concept, and these are presented in Table 1.

These scaffolds underpin the actions of strong, vibrant, courageous, passionate and effective leaders – principals who can navigate educational changes to unlock educational opportunities for Pasifika students, to free them from the agony of an underachievement crisis that has occurred for too long. Leaders who take up the position of master navigator in their va’a, are effectively able to use the seven scaffolds under the PEP banner, and enact culturally responsive teaching for Pasifika students’ school engagement and achievement.

Continued effort is required to work with, and find, principals who will commit to the seven scaffolds within the PEP – and provide them with ongoing support to engage in changing their school environments. Further research needs to focus on effective leadership and school transitions; developing the seven scaffolds; following Pasifika students’ educational progress in schools where effective leaders are positioned; and how professional development can encourage principals to become master navigators in their school va’a.
Table 1: The key concepts (supports) and categories underpinning effective principal leadership for Pasifika learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Categories</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building dynamic relationships with students and families</td>
<td>Centrality of relationships, Cultural connection, Knowing, Caring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Pasifika cultural world views</td>
<td>Being proactive, Increase cultural capital, Being a learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective use of achievement data information</td>
<td>Need for data, Programme planning, Pasifika resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthening culturally responsive leadership practices</td>
<td>Leadership support, Parents and families, Leadership effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating robust community engagement</td>
<td>Positive connection, Parents contribute to curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting high expectations for success and achievement</td>
<td>Recipe for success, Motivated school leaders, Success a priority, Personal and professional philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in motivational professional development</td>
<td>Culturally responsive practice, Pedagogy, Teaching as inquiry, Prior knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


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