

“In order to teach you, I must know you”

The Pasifika Initiative: A professional development project for teachers

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The lifting of achievement for Pasifika students is a key focus of the New Zealand Government's professional development priorities for practising teachers. This article outlines a project (The Pasifika Initiative) undertaken by UC Education Plus, University of Canterbury, which aims to develop teachers' cultural self-efficacy and hence their ability to influence positively Pasifika students' engagement, motivation and achievement. The Initiative aims to provide teachers from schools with significant numbers of Pasifika students with the experience of living in another culture where the first language is not their own; to develop in those teachers an appreciation of challenges children from Pasifika cultures face in coping in an education system based on cultural values which are not theirs; and to develop in those teachers a capacity and willingness to apply what they have learned to their own teaching practice. The article draws on the reflective insights of five teachers who participated in the 2007 trip to Samoa. The experiences of these teachers were explored before, during and after their time in Samoa with a view to identifying changes in their thinking, in their relations with Pasifika students and the Pasifika community and in their classroom practice.

Introduction

The quotation in this article's title, “In order to teach you I must know you” (Delpit, 2001, p. 211), raises questions about what it means ‘to know’ the students we teach. If ‘knowing’ includes having an understanding of the social and cultural contexts that shape our students' prior learning, social interactions, and ability to achieve in the New Zealand education system, then we as teachers face a challenging task in our increasingly multicultural classrooms. We need to be able both to support students' transition into a very different teaching and learning environment and enable the same students to bring their own knowledge and ways of being into our classrooms. The ‘at risk’ label frequently attached to our Maori and Pasifika students, suggests that we are not yet achieving these aims effectively.

The Ministry of Education's *Pasifika Education Plan 2006-2010* highlights the extent to which Pasifika students in New Zealand are lagging behind other student groups. The National Education Monitoring Project indicates that, in comparison with other groups, Pasifika students at Year 4 and Year 8 are generally performing below national means. In 2004, 16% of Pasifika students were leaving school with few or no formal qualifications. The rate of suspension of Pasifika students did not change between 2001, when it was at 9% of the Pasifika student cohort, and 2004. The one redeeming development over this period was that Pasifika students were tending to stay at school longer and the proportion of students leaving school with University Entrance increased from 10% in 2001 to 15% in 2004.

The Pasifika Education Plan is designed to bring about positive shifts in performance as measured by national and international assessment. The plan asserts that by 2010 the proportion of Pasifika students leaving school with little or no formal attainment will match that of other school leavers. The intention is to increase the proportion of

Pasifika students leaving school with at least Level 2 NCEA or equivalent from 52% (2004) to at least 60% by 2010. Thus the lifting of achievement for Pasifika students is a key focus of the Government's professional development priorities for practising teachers. The Ministry of Education's position paper (2007a) calls for improvements in student presence, engagement and achievement with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy for Maori and Pasifika students. To these ends, advisors working with teachers and schools through professional development programmes are expected to support teachers to critically examine their existing beliefs, expectations and professional practices and to develop inclusive school cultures which acknowledge the identity and diversity of all students (Ministry of Education, 2007b).

UC Education Plus provides support services to early childhood centres, primary and secondary schools in an area that extends from the Waitaki River to Nelson-Marlborough and includes the West Coast of the South Island. The patterns of underachievement in this area for students of Pacific nations are similar to those reported nationally. Pasifika students are concentrated mostly in schools within the Christchurch City area although other Pasifika groupings also occur in Nelson and Marlborough.

To assist teachers in this region to better address the learning needs of students from Pasifika cultures, UC Education Plus has a Pacific Nations adviser working as part of the team of advisers providing professional development through the Teacher Support Services Contract. Advisers have been challenged to find ways of working successfully with teachers who are usually of European ethnic origin (*palagi*). The advisory team has adopted the Pasifika process known as *Fa'afaletui* or the weaving together of knowledge. This entails a collaborative approach drawing on the skills and expertise not only of the Pacific Nations advisor but of a collaborative team of curriculum advisors. The philosophy underpinning this work and driving the Pasifika Initiative, is captured in the following Samoan saying:

O tu, aganu'u, ma agaifanua a le tamaititi o le a le mafai ona ulufale atu I le potuaoga sei vagana ua fa'atauaina ma faaulufaleina muamua I le loto ma le agaga o le faiaoga. (The culture of the child cannot enter the classroom until it has first entered the consciousness of the teacher).

According to the authors of the *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration* (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007, p. 230), "we were unable to locate any [studies] that were specifically concerned with promoting the professional learning of teachers of Pasifika students in New Zealand...this is another gap urgently in need of filling". This article begins the process of addressing that gap.

Challenging the deficit discourse

Many teachers remain oblivious to the fact that they bring their own culturally generated traditions of meaning-making to the classroom (Bishop and Glynn, 1999). Drawing on work by Alton-Lee, Nuthall & Patrick (1987) and Simon (1984, 1990), Bishop and Glynn (p. 134) conclude that teachers' understanding of what is best for children "is determined within their own Eurocentric world-view which incorporates their own particular cultural perspectives on epistemology and pedagogy". Thus a teacher's classroom practice reflects beliefs and assumptions about teaching that are

likely to be embedded in dominant discourses. One particularly powerful discourse which has permeated teachers' theorising in relation to the educational achievement of Maori students in New Zealand, has been that of 'deficit' (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, Richardson, Mitai, & Savill, 2002; Patrick, 2007; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005). Such labelling creates low expectations of student ability and a self-fulfilling prophecy of Maori student failure (Bishop et al., 2002). The achievement of Pasifika students has attracted a similar deficit labelling (see for example Nakhid, 2003). In the US, Lasdon-Billings (1995) notes a shift from deficit theorising to use of the term 'at risk' – a shift also apparent in New Zealand (for example, Alton-Lee, 2003; Ministry of Education 2003).

In further locally based research the teacher-student relationship has been shown to be critical in improving educational achievement (see for example, Carpenter, McMurchy-Pilkington & Sutherland, 2000; Cowley, Dabb & Jones, 2000; Hawk, Cowley, Hill & Sutherland, 2002; Hawk & Hill, 1998). These studies conclude that, for effective learning to occur for Maori and Pasifika students, what is important is not the ethnicity of the teacher but her attitudes, values, behaviours, effort and skills and her demonstrable "understanding of and empathy with Maori and Pasifika cultures" (Hawk, Cowley, Hill & Sutherland, 2002, p. 45). Bishop et al. agree.

It is clear that the major influence on Maori students' educational achievement lies in the minds and actions of their teachers. Changing how teachers theorise their relationships with students and how they relate to and interact with them in the classroom can have an impact upon students' engagement, their learning and their academic achievement. (Bishop et al., 2002, p. 123)

Research points to the value of a two-pronged approach in which teachers come to a critical awareness and understanding of their own culture as well as that of their students' (Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The initiative we outline in this article focuses primarily on the second of these two strategies – coming to understand another culture. Metge (1990) argues that a multicultural approach to education includes staff and students developing a first-hand working knowledge of other cultures. Culture cannot be understood in the abstract. Rather it is understood by "encountering people linked in a web of social relations, as they interact in the light of their cultural beliefs" (Metge, 1990, p. 36). Thus, schools should aim "to provide staff and students with first-hand experience and knowledge of at least one ethnic group and culture other than their own" and "to develop the ability of staff and students to interact effectively with people of a different cultural background from their own" (Metge, 1990, p. 40).

The value of experiential learning

Providing teachers with direct experience of another culture, the culture of many of their students, challenges those teachers to examine their existing beliefs and attitudes towards that culture and to reflect on how those attitudes and beliefs might positively or negatively impact on their effectiveness as teachers. This is a fundamental tenet of the Pasifika initiative.

The importance of providing such experiences as a way of helping teachers make connections with (in this case) Pasifika students and their families is supported by research. For example, Villegas and Lucas (2002) outline a number of ways in which

field experiences can enhance the education of culturally responsive teachers. They suggest that such experiences offer teachers their only opportunity to build a contextualised understanding of culturally responsive teaching by getting them out into schools and communities. Similarly Wilson (1987) describes cross-cultural experiential learning initiatives for teachers in which teachers from one culture are immersed in another culture. According to Wilson, “persons are more likely to ‘learn from experience’ when they are prepared for the experience, engage in educational activities during the experience, and evaluate the experience” (p. 520).

Various New Zealand and Pasifika researchers (for example, Helu-Thaman, 2000; Robinson & Timperley, 2004), point to the importance of teachers being able to make cultural connections with students, families and communities. Alton-Lee (2003) identifies a number of necessary links which teachers need to make between school and other cultural contexts in which their students have been socialised. These links include ensuring that student experiences of instruction have known relationships to other cultural contexts in which the students have been/are socialized; that relevance is made transparent to students; that cultural practices at school are made transparent and taught; that teaching practice recognizes and builds on students’ prior experiences and knowledge; that teachers respect and affirm cultural identity; and that there are effective home-school partnerships. Helu-Thaman stresses that as teachers

we must continue to better contextualise our teaching because the content of the curricula that we are often asked to implement is so alien from the realities of our students that their success will depend on the extent to which we as teachers are able to make learning meaningful for them. (Helu-Thaman, 2000, p. 8)

The philosophy underpinning the Pasifika Initiative is that teachers are more likely to make shifts in their personal beliefs and attitudes and in their teaching practice by actually being placed into an environment which is culturally different from theirs, where the language spoken is not theirs. Such challenges are not easy to achieve when teachers remain within their own school communities.

Developing cultural self-efficacy

We believe that teachers’ cultural self-efficacy and sense of agency may be significantly enhanced by the learning experiences gained in Samoa. Drawing on Bandura’s (2002) notions of self-efficacy, Gibbs (2005, p.102) defines teacher self efficacy as the “teacher’s beliefs in his or her capability to organise and execute course of actions required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context”. These beliefs, it is suggested, influence how teachers teach and how they make use of educational innovation and instructional practices. For those teachers who work in multicultural settings, Gibbs suggests that:

Given the complexity of demands in multicultural settings, how teachers perceive their self-efficacy as teachers will be instrumental in explaining how they teach and how students succeed in their learning. These beliefs, described as teachers’ cultural self-efficacy, are teachers’ perceptions of their capability to teach effectively in multi-cultural situations. (Gibbs, 2005, p.102)

According to Gibbs, a central focus in the education of teachers should be on developing teacher self-efficacy, particularly cultural self-efficacy. Cultural self-efficacy shapes teachers’ behaviour in multi-cultural settings and helps to determine why they behave in such ways. Strong personal cultural efficacy is likely to have a

positive effect on student motivation and achievement. Drawing further on Bandura, Gibbs discusses the concept of agency. When individuals act with a sense of autonomy and intentionality they exercise what is known as agency. Gibbs identifies three forms of agency of significance in multicultural settings. These are: personal agency – an individual functions intentionally in ways that influence themselves as well as their environment; proxy agency – individuals achieve desired outcomes by influencing others to act on their behalf; and collective agency – individuals act collectively to influence their circumstances.

Using any or all of these three forms, teachers can apply agency in cultural terms to bring about culturally appropriate outcomes for their students. Teachers who are highly efficacious are most likely to “demonstrate resilience, persistence and innovation in their instruction when confronted with challenging teaching situations” (Gibbs, 2005, p.106). Teaching in multicultural settings is likely to increase the demands on teachers and their ability to act with a sense of agency in such settings will be significantly affected by the extent to which they possess cultural self-efficacy.

The professional development initiative we outline below has been designed to enhance teachers’ cultural self-efficacy and agency through reflective immersion in another culture.

The Pasifika initiative

The Pasifika initiative is seeking a way of more effectively meeting the professional development needs of teachers who teach in culturally diverse settings and who wish to enhance their students’ achievement. The project aims to help teachers clarify their beliefs and attitudes towards other cultures so that they can better understand and respond to the learning needs of their students. By getting teachers to participate in the project and providing a variety of contexts in which their beliefs and attitudes are challenged and clarified, we anticipate that teacher cultural self-efficacy will be enhanced and that teachers will be able to teach more effectively those students who come from Pasifika cultural backgrounds.

The Initiative has been offered every two years (starting in 2003) to teachers in the region served by UC Education Plus. Those participating have been largely teachers from primary, intermediate and secondary schools, though included in the 2007 group were early childhood educators and social workers. Many of those taking part had their costs paid for by their schools. UC Education Plus advisors also participate in the Initiative as part of their own professional development and to enable them to carry out more effectively their support work in schools in the spirit of *Fa’afaletui*.

The project takes teachers to Samoa for ten days. Prior to departure a series of sessions is provided to introduce participants to the Samoan language and culture. In Samoa the group spends most of its time in a village on the island of Savaii. Teachers are boarded with families in the village and are included in family and village life for the duration of their stay. A programme of visits to local schools and cultural activities is provided.

Regular briefing and debriefing sessions are held for those taking part so that teachers have the opportunity to share their reflections on their experiences. The intention is to build a cross-sector professional learning community amongst those who have

participated so that their learning can continue to be shared with one another and with other teachers back in New Zealand.

The research group

Given the aims of the Initiative we were interested to gain some insights into the cultural attitudes and beliefs of the participating teachers and to explore how their experience with the Initiative might cause those beliefs and attitudes to shift in ways that could impact on their role as teachers.

Five teachers (three from primary schools and two from high schools) involved in the 2007 Initiative were invited to form a small research group. The teachers worked in schools with proportions of Pasifika students ranging from 10% to 15% for the secondary schools and 20% to 30% for the primary schools. The teachers had a range of experience from three years up to 20 and 23 years. All agreed to be involved in the research group.

Each teacher completed a pre-trip written survey. The teachers were also asked to keep a personal journal of their participation in the project as an aid to their reflection on their learning. These were made accessible to the authors following the visit. During their time in Samoa the five participants were interviewed using a focus group format. Teachers were asked in the semi-structured interview to identify the experiences in Samoa which had impacted most significantly on their thinking as teachers and what they might do as a result of that reflection when they were back in their schools. This explicit separation of 'thinking' and 'practice' was premised on the understanding that sustainable changes in teaching practice are only likely to be achieved following significant conceptual shifts.

The five teachers were again interviewed together some five weeks after their return from Samoa. Both this interview and the one in Samoa were recorded and transcribed. In the second interview the teachers were asked to outline in what ways their thinking had changed as a result of their participation in the project and what experiences in particular had had an impact. In addition the teachers were asked to outline what aspects of their learning from the project they were applying to their teaching practice, what impact that had had on their students, on their role within their school and their relationship with parents. Each teacher also completed a written survey eliciting their views on what they had learned from the project and how they were applying that learning. Personal journals were shared with the research team.

This extensive personal and shared reflection/evaluation reinforced the 'learning from experience' (Wilson, 1987) and from one another. Having data from before, during and after-participation in the Initiative meant that, in analysis, the authors were able to identify key themes and insights (as well as what triggered those insights) and track shifts in teachers' thinking over time.

Findings from the research group

Teachers' views prior to the visit to Samoa

Before departing for Samoa, members of the research group were asked to complete a survey outlining the ways they met the needs of Pasifika students. Responses focussed on the use of discussion and group work prior to individual tasks and on showing an interest in students' out-of-class activities. All teachers talked of incorporating

Pasifika themes and materials into their programmes. They demonstrated a high level of sensitivity to the needs of their children.

As part of a pre-trip survey, teachers were asked to position themselves on a five-point scale (from highly developed to very limited) with respect to their understanding of Pasifika culture and of Pasifika ways of teaching and learning. Most of the teachers regarded their understanding of Pasifika culture to be 'limited' while they rated their pedagogical understandings as 'limited' or 'very limited'. "I have not considered changing or adapting my pedagogical style for Pasifika students. To be honest I wasn't aware that the students needed a different approach". Asked why they had decided to participate in the Initiative, teachers focussed on a desire to understand better the cultures of their students and to use the experience to improve their teaching. "I am interested in understanding the values and lifestyle that underpin Samoan students' lives". "[I want] a better understanding of how I can create a democratic classroom environment where I can co-construct my programme with my students." All teachers hoped to gain a deeper understanding of Pasifika culture and, in doing so, to achieve greater acceptance from their Pasifika students. They were seeking a stronger rapport with students and their parents. They also hoped for an enhanced collective cultural agency. As one teacher put it, she wanted to: "Be able to develop a rapport to work with other teachers at our school to help the Pasifika children".

Teacher perceptions of their learning during their time in Samoa

The five teachers were interviewed midway through their stay in the village on Savaii Island, Samoa. They were asked to identify experiences that they considered had a significant impact on the way they thought about themselves as teachers. In responding, these teachers were seeking to make connections with the children and their families from their own schools back home. In the course of the interview the teachers were clearly weighing up what they were observing and experiencing during their time in Samoa against their own beliefs and their practice as teachers with respect to Pasifika children. They reviewed how they might organise and teach in order to respect, value and encourage their students' cultural beliefs, thinking and actions so that they become integral to learning (Gibbs, 2005).

The experience of living with a Samoan family offered teachers an insight into family relationships, roles and responsibilities. Care and respect for parents, coupled with financial support, was a significant theme.

The way the families care for each other is really impressive because my homestay... she is a teacher and she lives here to look after her parents, her brother also lives here to look after his parents and, I think, that when others in the family go to New Zealand they are expected to support their family back here.

Teachers also observed and reflected on the closeness of Samoan family life, making an implicit comparison with the generally more fractured palagi family.

Seeing how much is shared – the food, the way it's recycled. The way they all sleep together. The way babies are held. The way they talk to each other so much... This has been quite a profound thing. As a teacher I know that Pasifika children need to work together but now I know why and I've seen how deep that need is.

They noted the high value families placed on supporting their children's learning and drew a further comparison with the situation in New Zealand.

The children get home from school and the adults help them either straight after school or after dinner with their homework... well at home a lot of the parents aren't able to help because of lot of them don't speak English or if they do they don't speak it well enough to be able to help them with high school homework ... they just can't help them so I think it's very difficult for the children to do something like homework.

Through observing and participating in village life the teachers became aware of the importance of humour and of the 'physicality' of Samoan life, expressed in music, dance and food preparation.

The humour in their society is something that I didn't realise and it's made me reflect on two of my current students who are like little clowns –playing around like little puppies – sometimes that can't be accommodated in the regular classroom.

Several teachers commented on the social structures underpinning family and village interactions.

Something that I've become aware of is that Samoa seems to be a very laid-back community and it is harmonious but underpinning it all is a very strict structure where everyone has their place and knows their place and from what I can gather makes sure that they fulfil their roles so that life does go on harmoniously.

Observing the teacher-directed, highly structured Samoan classrooms offered teachers an insight into the difficulties experienced by Samoan students adjusting to much more student-centred New Zealand classrooms. One teacher reflected:

They go from something that is completely structured – you sit in your chair and you don't get up unless you're told to – you don't talk unless you're told to... and they come to NZ and its: "come and sit on the mat"; "now go and sit at a desk"; "now its time to come and chat"; "now its time to discuss"; "its time to listen"; "its time to whatever..." and there's too much freedom...

A connection was made between the activity of village life and classroom performance.

Often the children come to school and you think they're really tired and I think I understand now why perhaps they are tired ... the children fit into the village way of life and possibly for a lot of our families when they come to New Zealand they continue to do a lot of village-type of activities together so these children may be going to bed really late because they've been out at a family do.

When the teachers outlined how their experiences might influence their approach to teaching Pasifika students, their enhanced cultural self-efficacy and readiness to re-evaluate what they were doing in the classroom was apparent. The impact of the experiential learning on individual teaching approaches was clearly articulated.

I'm really excited to have so many resources I can use and I feel like I'll be able to use them in a meaningful way because I've been there and I've seen it and I've seen it in context and I think I've always been a little wary of talking with any kind of knowledge about things I haven't experienced. So it's really valuable... I can understand the significance of things, in terms of the way I work with students.

Planned changes in classroom practice included making instructions very clear for second language learners, facilitating transitions through the use of music and village-

type activities, integrating rhythm and more structured, formal oracy and acknowledging the need to work together as well as individually.

Teachers considered how they might apply what they had learned to strengthening their relationships with Pasifika students. One teacher thought she had been doing a good job but now perceived the need to “take a lot more time to get to know the students in front of me”. She saw that learning could be reciprocal and that, in the process, students own cultural self-efficacy could be raised. “Because just looking at the excitement of the students and how interested they were in me going in and being able to talk about things and tell me about it. You know they had knowledge they could give me”. Another teacher understood student mannerisms that she had been trying to suppress. “We’re trying to stop something that is totally, totally ingrained and you know we find it really frustrating and it’s something that we’re going... I’m personally going to have to be a little bit more tolerant of”.

Teachers also reflected on how they might approach the strengthening of relationships with families and the wider Pasifika community. They talked of making a greater effort to contact families, participate in cultural activities, organise activities at the school that would attract Samoan families. “I’ve learned why food is such an important part – if we have food at school at a do or activity then we tend to get more people – it is an important part of the Samoan way of life”. One teacher hoped that:

this has been a start anyway of understanding the culture enough to be able to liaise more with parents because we are very careful about who liaises with Samoan parents in our school and I would like to think that I could understand and be respectful enough that I would be able to do that.

When asked to think about how collectively they might work more effectively to strengthen their approach to the teaching of Pasifika children, the teachers focussed on ways of bringing their schools and their Pasifika communities closer together, basing their thinking on what they had observed from their time in the village.

[We] were talking yesterday about having a fia fia night because we are at different schools but in a similar area... so we thought it would be kind of neat to organise... in New Zealand we would normally have a meeting and then you go home but maybe we have to think more about making it into a night where there’s maybe some entertainment because that’s how they see part of their celebration – that’s all part of it.

Thus a heightened collective cultural efficacy was also an outcome of participation in the Initiative.

Teachers’ reflections on their experience and how it has influenced their teaching practice

The research group came together again some five weeks after their return to New Zealand. Using the observations recorded in their journals, the five teachers shared their thoughts around the key learnings they felt they had taken from the Initiative and how they were applying those learnings to their teaching practice. The group also completed an evaluative written questionnaire.

Four especially significant developments were apparent from this group discussion. These were: conceptual transformation; specific teaching strategies; relationships with

students; and interactions with families/community. The first development related to the nature and level of the teachers' understanding of Samoan society and culture. The group talked of a 'greater awareness' of students' needs. The word 'understanding' was used repeatedly. One teacher observed:

I think for me, a dual thing was thinking about that deep level - the social goals and values that exist within the community and thinking about the relationships between Samoan and Samoan and Samoan and Palangi and parents and children and thinking about how that translates to classroom and teacher and where it does.

Another teacher talked of a student who had come straight from Samoa with two years education "and I couldn't marry what he supposedly knew and where I thought he might be until I actually went there and looked and now, OK, I actually know...my expectations failed that child at that stage".

As a result of the experience of village life, the thinking tended to embrace not only Pasifika students but also their families. "In relation to the families I have much greater understanding of where they are coming from, of what their circumstances are, what their perceptions and misunderstandings could be and have evidently been...". This in turn translated into an appreciation of the difficulties facing Samoan students in New Zealand schools.

For some of them coming from the village life in Samoa into life in Christchurch, it is so difficult - huge—it's such a cultural difference that not only are they dealing with a new classroom, they're dealing with not having that family support, not having their mates around them that they can just hang out with all the time and that even if there are family here they may be quite a distance away.

Growing out of these deeper insights into the nature of Samoan society and culture were some specific teaching strategies that teachers were developing. These included acknowledging and drawing on students' prior knowledge, making more use of the Samoan language in the classroom, keeping instructions clear and simple, implementing a more structured approach for new students, repetition of new skills, devising questions that challenge students to think more deeply, treating every student as an important individual and finding and making culturally appropriate resources. In particular, teachers were thinking beyond a deficit model.

I'm actively looking for ways that I can actually assist my students and, you know, how can I go about sharing that knowledge that my children have with the other class so that I can put them in the expert role rather than them trailing behind.

At this early stage teachers were cautious in making claims about changes in their practice and how these might be impacting on their Pasifika students. However they all noted an improvement in their students' level of engagement. In describing the students' behaviour they used terms such as "interested and engaged"; feeling "more included"; and "enjoying new strategies/activities". They saw students who responded with interest to their teacher's new knowledge of Samoan culture and who enjoyed the use of Samoan language in class. Students were "more active in class situations where there is Samoan content" and "more vocal discussing aspects of their culture". Mutual respect for each other's cultures had increased.

The fourth development involved interaction with Pasifika families and community. This interaction took different forms. All the teachers described a much improved relationship with Pasifika families. “Parents are more comfortable approaching me. I have been able to understand family situations and explain to other staff what might be happening”.

They’ll [parents] come up and talk to me. Before this, they would duck their heads down but now they smile and talk and chat and with the home/school partnership meetings that I’m running they’ll turn up – we’ve had a better turn out from parents since this trip and they’re a lot – they understand that I’m a lot more interested as well.

As well as enhanced contact with families, the teachers were aware that they now had cultural understandings of value to other staff members, for example, in the planning of whole school units.

The other one too is being able to talk to staff – something might happen and I’ve got a better understanding of trying to explain to staff – “well this might be happening in that family” or “This is what they might be experiencing so we need to work this way, or maybe we need to contact the family and see just what is happening...” so staff actually come and ask me.

For one teacher, participation in the Initiative had given her the confidence to take on the role of Pasifika liaison officer.

Outcomes for these teachers from participation in the Pasifika initiative

The aim of the Pasifika Initiative is to challenge teachers to examine and transform their cultural assumptions, attitudes and beliefs. We suggest that the most effective way to do this is to provide them with a direct field-experience in which the teachers live in a Pasifika community as part of the community, albeit for a very limited period of time, functioning as members of that community. The experiential nature of the Initiative means that participants own the knowledge, it is ‘in their skin’. Because their thinking is challenged and transformed the changes to their practice are likely to be more significant and sustainable.

Just witnessing and being a part of things, just that whole experiential thing. It’s easier to read it in a book or watch it on films but actually living and breathing it you take it in and the other thing is that I’ve got real life experiences that I can draw on to then shape things.

The reflective voices of the five teachers in the previous section suggest that this sort of cultural immersion opens up new and deeper ways of understanding and ‘knowing’ Samoan children in New Zealand classrooms. It offers the teachers a cultural context in which to place their students. As a result the teachers feel more confident about the possibility of making changes in their own teaching practice and of working collectively at the school and community levels, to better meet the needs of their Pasifika students.

To better provide for students in multi-cultural settings, Gibbs (2005) suggests that teachers and teacher educators face three major challenges. The first concerns the ways teachers can identify and teach individual students whose preferred orientations vary across situations. The second relates to understanding how teachers might utilise

their own personal cultural self-efficacy and collective cultural efficacy to bring about culturally appropriate outcomes for students. The third addresses the ways in which teachers might be able to take cognisance of and make use of their students' personal cultural and collective cultural efficacy in ways that enable them to learn more effectively.

In relation to the first challenge, the teachers in the research group demonstrated a greater awareness of the need to identify and provide for individual student needs and that those needs may vary.

Being challenged about my whole idea that co-operative learning is good for PI and Maori students - but then what I experienced in a Samoan classroom was actually very different and thinking about the fact that, yes they might be very good socially but that doesn't necessarily translate into them being able to operate in a constructive way in a classroom and also not taking for granted that they have seen how relationships work or how roles work.

In relation to the second challenge, the teachers talked about how their experiences and own learnings shaped their personal cultural and collective cultural efficacy in ways which were helping them to review how they approached teaching Pasifika children.

I suppose giving me more confidence about being able to talk from experience you know rather than...its that whole idea of otherness...rather than being the coloniser and saying 'oh you know this is your culture and in your culture you do these things'.

The five teachers, also provided evidence of their searching for ways in which the personal cultural and collective cultural self-efficacy of their Pasifika students could be more directly recognised and incorporated into their teaching practice. "So I'm certainly looking for resources that I can develop with my Pasifika children and hopefully bring out the experience that my Samoan children can hopefully take a leadership role in".

Questions remained for the teachers. In particular they wondered how best to help Pasifika students make the transition from a more teacher directed to a more student centred form of learning. They wondered how to enable students to 'marry' the Samoan and New Zealand experiences. They were also concerned about finding the best balance between individual and group work, in a way that signalled the valuing of both. The research group meetings have provided and will continue to provide a forum in which such questions could be raised and possibilities for action shared.

Conclusion

The outcomes in educational terms from the previous groups participating in the Pasifika Initiative in 2003 and 2005 have not been tracked in any systematic manner. While there have been some significant outcomes as reported by the advisers who travelled to Samoa with the first two groups and recorded in milestone reports to the Ministry of Education, no attempt was made to track the teacher learning arising from participation in this project.

This inquiry has attempted to do just that. It has explored the views and experiences of the five teachers using written surveys (pre and post visit) and semi-structured interviews both during and after the visit. The outcomes of the inquiry to date suggest

that sites for teacher learning may be more diverse than those generally indicated in the Teacher Professional Learning and Development BES (Timperley et al., 2007) and that experiential processes have a role to play in enhancing teachers' cultural understandings and improving relationships with Pasifika students and their families.

The next step with this project will be to follow up with the five teachers at the beginning of 2008, focussing in particular on determining the extent to which the teachers are applying their personal and collective cultural agency to tackling the learning needs of their Pasifika students and the ways they may be applying that agency to enhancing their school's contact with parents and the wider Pasifika community. We are also interested in facilitating and monitoring on-going networking amongst those teachers who have engaged in the Pasifika Initiative. Possible future work could include student and parental perspectives on the contribution of the Pasifika initiative to Pasifika students' learning.

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