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***‘O mātou ‘o le fatu ‘o le fa‘amoemoe –  
fesili mai!***

***We are the heart of the matter - ask us!***

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education  
at Massey University, Palmerston North  
New Zealand**

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## **Abstract**

This study explored the perspectives of junior secondary school students of Pacific heritage and asked them what enhanced their learning. A qualitative, interpretive framework was used for this multi-site case study and grounded theory was used to analyse data. Three groups of Year 9 and 10 students from three North Island city schools, representing a range of Pacific nations, socio-economic areas and genders, participated in focus group interviews and questionnaires. Pacific concepts, values and research methodologies were explored and integrated into both the research process and discussion of the findings. An innovative approach was trialled which involved “insider” research assistants facilitating the focus group interviews: four Samoan teenagers worked with the researcher to draw out the opinions and ideas of the participants about what helped them to learn. Data analysis led to the identification of ten pedagogical attributes and strategies. The voices of the participants in this study echo the findings of earlier New Zealand research, which demonstrate that the key factor for successful Pacific learning is the strength of the relationship between teachers and learners.

## Acknowledgements

Ia ō gatasi le futia ma le 'umele  
*Let there be unity, for in unity there is strength*

The literal translation of this ancient Samoan proverb is *Bring together the sennit ring and the stand*. These words, from a fishing context, refer to the stand on which the fishing rod sits and the ring which fixes the rod to the stand. This proverb was found for me by Fanaafi Winona Hewitt who has been the cultural advisor for this thesis research. The words are applicable to this work on many levels; they are about people working together. They signify strength of relationships that are needed for Pacific students to engage, learn and succeed: the sennit ring as the teacher, the stand the learner and the rod the learning which thrives if the ring and the stand are bound firmly together. The proverb also reflects the team work that underpins this study and the collective orientation of the Pacific cultures; in contrast to the individualistic orientation of most western cultures.

Thanks to Fanaafi Winona Hewitt for her constant friendship, translation work and advice. We spent many hours discussing “the learning of our Pasefika children” as well as the practicalities and theories related to this research. Winona and the Hewitt family have embraced our family as their own and we are honoured to be called the “pālagi family with brown hearts”. I am grateful for the insights you have given me into Samoan culture and values. I am particularly grateful that you have lent me your children to help with this work. Thank you Eitiare for the enthusiasm, advice and leadership you have shown as you have supported me with this work and attended all the focus group interviews as well as other meetings. Thanks too to Jimmy Jnr, for giving up your time for this project. It was clear the Pacific boys we worked with looked up to you and respected your gentle leadership.

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

**‘O mātou ‘o le fatu ‘o le fa’amoemoe – fesili mai**

We are the heart of the matter – ask us!

### **1.1 Introduction**

The goal of raising the educational achievement for students of Pacific descent remains a challenge for the New Zealand education system. Since 2008 there has been a slight improvement in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) results for cohorts comprising students of Pacific heritage (NZQA, 2014). However, a significant gap remains between the performance of Pacific students and their New Zealand European (NZE) peers. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) annual report on NCEA achievement (2014) shows 2013 national results for Year 12 and 13 Pacific students were 11% and 16% below those for NZE students in Level 2 and Level 3 respectively. Only 34.9% of Pacific students attained University Entrance compared to 59.1% of NZE students. According to the most recent international PISA survey, the results for fifteen year old Pacific students resident in New Zealand were significantly below both the OECD and NZE average scores in reading, mathematics and science. (May, Cowles & Lamy, 2013). New Zealand’s Pacific student population is rising. Statistics New Zealand predicts that by 2051 the current Pacific student population will rise from one in ten Pacific learners to one in five. “Those learners will represent a wide variety of Pacific nations and communities. The implications for education services are huge” (Statistics NZ/MPIA 2010, p.8.). The authors state the challenge is to explore why the education system is failing Pacific students. They conclude “There is no simple answer to this” (p. 21).

To a large extent, the voices of Pacific young people have not formally informed strategies, plans and approaches to comprehensively engage Pacific students in their learning and boost their educational success (Nakid, 2003; Spiller, 2012). Fifteen years ago Hill and Hawk (2000) investigated Pacific students’ perspectives about effective teaching. More recently others such as Amituanai-Toloa, McNaughton, Kuin and Airini (2009), Hunter and Anthony

(2011), Otunuku (2010) and Spiller (2012) have included student voice in their research to explore factors that contribute to Pacific educational success. It is unclear whether policy-makers and educators have responded to these research findings and to the voices of the young people at the heart of the matter. The international student voice literature demonstrates how important and powerful the contributions of learners are to the design of curriculum and pedagogy (Cook-Sather, 2009; Mitra, 2008; Rudduck, 2007). In New Zealand, longitudinal research on the Te Kotahitanga project has demonstrated that a transformation of teaching methods, informed by the perspectives of students, has led to increased academic success for young Māori (Alton-Lee, 2014).

The purpose of this thesis research is to explore the views of junior secondary Pacific students and find out what they believe is effective teaching and learning for them. It is hoped that this exploratory study, which privileges the voices of the key stakeholders, may contribute to the emerging body of evidence about enhancing Pacific educational success.

## 1.2 Who are Pacific students?

“I didn’t realise I was a Pasifika person or an Islander until I arrived at the airport in Mangere, before that I was a Samoan!”

(Schuster, 2008, p.12)

There are many terms and spellings used to describe people of Pacific heritage including *Pacific*, *Pasifika*, *Pasefika*, *Pacifica*, *Pacific Islander* and *Polynesian*. As Schuster implies with his statement above, the most appropriate ethnic description is likely to be the one that refers to the Pacific nation with which each person identifies. *Pasifika* is a collective term, generated in New Zealand and used, predominantly by government agencies and education institutions, to describe people of Pacific nation descent who reside in New Zealand and “who identify themselves with their indigenous Pacific countries of origin because of ancestry or heritage, family and cultural connections with Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and other Pacific countries” (Schuster, 2008, p. 12). Throughout this thesis the term *Pacific* has been used to describe people of Pacific heritage. Pacific people are not an homogenous group and the term Pacific does not refer to a single

nationality or ethnic culture. National educational outcomes data for students of Pacific heritage are most often collated and reported as one Pacific group. This thesis research was motivated largely by patterns of Pacific student achievement and its purpose was to explore teaching and learning that contributes to success for Pacific students. Otunuku (2010) investigated aspects of educational success for Tongan students. Whereas differentiated research such as this, which deals with one ethnic culture, is ideal, it was beyond the scope of this thesis study to separately examine the perspectives of students from a range of discrete Pacific nations. However this is an interesting area for future research as effective teaching and learning strategies for one group may not work for all. Samu (2006) examines the diversity of Pacific people and asks: “How can there be a Pacific pedagogy in the context of New Zealand schools when Pasifika people are so diverse?” (p. 45).

On the other hand, although Pacific learners represent a diverse range of national ethnicities, Pacific cultures share some common values. Anae, Coxon, Mara, Wendt-Samu & Finau (2001) describe these as “respect, reciprocity, communalism and collective responsibility” (cited in Hunter & Anthony, 2011, p. 103).

The student participants in this research have self-identified<sup>1</sup> on their school records as belonging to a Pacific nation group. Some of the participants have two or more ethnicities. The participants’ ethnic affiliations include Tongan, Samoan, Cook Island Māori, and Fijian.

In this thesis the terms Pacific students, Pacific learners, students of Pacific heritage, and students of Pacific descent are used interchangeably. At times the participants, or in one case my cultural advisor, used the word “Pasefika”, in these cases I used the Samoan spelling of the word.

### **1.3 Theoretical and Paradigmatic Underpinnings**

This thesis aims to explore the perspectives of Pacific students about what helps them to learn. It is hoped that the findings of this research may contribute to enhanced teaching and learning practices for Pacific youth. Its central premise is that in order to transform learning for Pacific students it is important to listen to the voices of the learners. As Fielding (2004)

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<sup>1</sup> Students and/or their parent/caregiver have identified their ethnicity.

argues “transformation requires a rupture of the ordinary” (p. 296), so in this thesis research rupturing the ordinary by seeking, listening and responding to Pacific student voice may lead to improving their learning and achievement outcomes.

The study uses qualitative research methods and a case study approach based in an interpretivist paradigm. It privileges the perspectives and interpretations of those being studied and enables the researcher to build rich understandings of their viewpoints. The research design is influenced by student voice theory and literature. However, an innovative approach to collecting the data is trialled which involves students of Pacific heritage as research assistants.

Pacific values and research methodologies are integrated with traditional Western research methods. The research design can be interpreted as a hybrid approach; a mix of Pacific and Western paradigms. This is further explained in Chapters Two and Three. Pacific research literature, as well as ongoing dialogue and consultation with a Samoan cultural advisor, have informed my understandings about Pacific, and in particular Samoan, values and culture. Of particular relevance is the Samoan concept of ‘teu le vafealoa’i’ which loosely translates as ‘nurturing strong and respectful relationships’ and the pan-Pacific concept of the ‘va’, which again refers to relationships. Respect and nurturing of the ‘va’ is relevant in this thesis, both with regard to the data gathering methodologies used and the key findings of the research.

#### **1.4 Overview of chapters**

The thesis describes the context, rationale and motivation for the study, and uses relevant literature to frame the research. The research process is explained, the findings collated, analysed and reported, and the conclusions and implications discussed. In particular:

- Chapter Two describes recent and relevant research literature about student voice studies, effective teaching for Pacific students and findings from studies about middle years schooling. Explanation of Pacific research methodology and values are linked to relevant literature.
- Chapter Three provides an outline of the research design, methodology, data gathering tools, participant selection, study limitations and ethical considerations.
- The results are presented in Chapter Four.

- Chapter Five summarises and discusses the key findings. Links are made to relevant literature.
- Finally, in Chapter Six, the overall study conclusions are discussed. Links are made to literature and the implications of the findings for teachers, schools and the wider education sector are explored. Limitations of the study are acknowledged and suggestions for future areas of research are outlined.

## Chapter Two

### Literature review

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of literature relevant to this thesis research. It examines international student voice literature, research about teaching and learning for Pacific students and other key research literature used to inform this project. The Discover database on the Massey University website was the main search tool used. This gave me access to other key databases including ERIC, Education Source, A+ Education and Google Scholar; supplemented by readings recommended by colleagues and friends.

#### 2.2 Student Voice

Student voice research, involving consultation with students in primary and secondary school contexts, first became popular in the 1990s and early 2000s (Cook-Sather, 2014). At this time researchers and educators explored the perspectives of students regarding their learning experiences and encouraged their contribution to school reform efforts. Jean Rudduck and Julia Flutter were leading exponents of early student voice research which aimed to not only capture the words of pupils to inform educational practice and reform, but in the words of Cook-Sather (2014, p. 2) also to signal “the collective contribution of diverse students’ presence, participation and power in those processes”.

Cook-Sather describes the proliferation of student voice research that has taken place over the last two decades, including growth in the early childhood and tertiary sectors. Terms for this work include “child voice”, “pupil voice”, “student participation”, “youth-adult-partnership” and “youth activism”. These terms indicate the expansion and evolution of student voice work. In more recent years there has been an increased focus on students working as researchers and change agents. Fielding (as cited in Bourke & Loveridge, 2014) uses the term ‘radical collegiality’ to describe emerging partnerships between students and their teachers which have the potential to contribute to a transformation of teaching and learning.

This thesis is framed by the growing body of international student voice literature whose central tenet is captured by the words of Cook-Sather (2009): “students have insights that can help to improve teaching and learning” (p. 2). In addition to the positive, practical value and potential for educational transformation that consultation with learners offers, student voice is grounded in the principle of respect. Respect for the rights, views and aspirations of children and young people is articulated in Article 12 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (UNCRC, 1989. Article 12).*

Cook-Sather (2014) describes the UNCRC (1989) as “the most explicit statement of children’s rights to have informed student voice work” (p. 3). Many international writers, such as Bahou (2011), Bourke & Loveridge (2014), Cook-Sather (2009), O’Neill (2014) and Rudduck & McIntyre (2007), align their work to the UNCRC (1989).

This thesis research aims to bridge the generational culture gap between teenage learners, adult researchers and educators, and inquire into “the goodness of fit between schools and young people” (Rudduck as cited in Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007, p. 191). Rudduck argued that students’ commentaries on what helps them to learn in school and what gets in the way of their learning will help us to review the goodness of fit: “Over the last 20+ years, schools have changed less in their regimes and patterns of relationship than young people have changed” (p. 588). Bishop (2012) similarly refers to the stage-environment fit between students’ needs and their learning opportunities. Our world is changing fast and students are immersed in evolving digital technology, the youth entertainment industry and social media. As Prensky (2006) posits, today’s students are so different from their teachers’ generation “that we can no longer use our 20th century knowledge or our training as a guide to what is best for them educationally...it is only by listening to and valuing the ideas of our 21st century students that we will find solutions to many of our thorniest education problems” (p.1). Similarly, Poskitt (in press) argues that consulting adolescents about their

learning is vital, particularly for students from ethnic minority cultures, “if we are to better match their developmental and learning needs” (p. 19).

The use of student voice within teacher evaluations<sup>2</sup> has received increased attention in North America in recent years, some of which has been supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Ripley, 2012). Ripley describes studies which show that students are more accurate and astute about the performance of teachers than trained observers, that is, the students’ perceptions about their teachers correlated more strongly with academic achievement data than the judgements of the adult observers. The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) successfully campaigned for the mandatory inclusion of student feedback in teacher evaluations in the state of Massachusetts. This student body continues to promote student voice with the pertinent mantra: “We are the ones in the classroom – ask us!” (BSAC, 2012). These “photo booth” quotes from Boston high school students displayed on the *National Opportunity to Learn* website highlight the key premise underlying this thesis research: students are best placed to evaluate teacher effectiveness:

“Nothing about us without us is for us”

“Student voice improves relationships between students and teachers because teachers will listen rather than just teach”

“I’m the one in the classroom. I’m the one who experiences the classroom. Who knows more about what works or doesn’t?”

National Opportunity to Learn Campaign (2013)

Mitra’s work (2008) demonstrates the positive impact that student voice initiatives can have on teachers’ pedagogy and school reform. The student forum and related focus groups at Whitman High School led to improved communication and student-teacher partnerships. Mitra’s research indicates that students can play an essential role in the reform of a challenged urban school.

The most significant realisation of student voice work in New Zealand began in 2002 with the emergence of the *Te Kotahitanga* programme and its seminal ‘narratives of experience’

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<sup>2</sup> Teacher appraisals



research (Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai & Richardson, 2003). Bishop, Berryman and colleagues gathered a number of narratives of classroom experience, from Year 9 and 10 Māori students, by the process of collaborative storytelling. The *Te Kotahitanga* professional learning project and the *Effective Teaching Profile* were developed in response to the perspectives of Māori youth. Alton-Lee's 2014 report celebrates the academic success experienced by students as a result of the *Te Kotahitanga* approach, demonstrating that Phase 5 *Te Kotahitanga* schools have significantly higher numbers of Māori students achieving the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), particularly at NCEA level 2. In Bishop and Berryman (2009) the authors cite Cook-Sather's message, that it is essential to authorise the perspectives of students because this can lead to improved educational practice and generate educational reform. It is hoped that the voices of the Pacific students in this thesis research may provide teachers of Pacific learners with material to consider when they reflect on their teaching and the learning of their pupils.

Although there is a growing body of work that explores the theory, practice and impact of students working as co-researchers with their teachers, or leading research about learning in their classes and schools (Bahou, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2014; Fielding & Bragg, 2003), there is a gap in the literature with regard to students, particularly those from minority ethnic groups, who assist researchers doing student voice work. Searches of both Massey University library and the Ministry of Education library databases uncovered no relevant literature about this type of school-based insider-assisted research. For this thesis research I invited four Samoan secondary school students to assist me with the research, particularly with the facilitation of the focus group interviews. The rationale for this research design decision was based on my assumption that teenagers of Pacific heritage were more likely to comfortably engage in dialogue and openly express their opinions about their learning if they were conversing with their peers. I posit that my Samoan research assistants helped me to cross the borders of both ethnic and generational cultures and therefore it is more likely that we collegially elicited trustworthy and authentic data<sup>3</sup> from the student participants. The research assistants served as a type of conduit for me as an outsider with etic perspectives to access the insider, emic perspectives, for as Patton (2002) says:

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to Chapter Three for further discussion of standards of trustworthiness and authenticity within interpretive research.

“Understanding different perspectives from inside and outside a phenomenon goes to the core of qualitative inquiry” (p. 335). The core of the inquiry equates to the heart of the matter or “le fatu o le fa’amoemoe”. Patton includes a narrative by a mental health researcher in his description of insider-outsider research. Lee writes about her time as an involuntary patient in a locked mental health facility and concludes with the argument that researchers and evaluators must know what the experience of the researched stakeholders really is. She uses the phrase picked up by the student voice campaigners of Boston: “Nothing about us, without us!” (Patton, 2002, p. 337). Cohen writes about using a similar approach in his research into a housing programme for sex industry workers. Five women who had been prostitutes were trained as focus group interviewers. They critiqued the interview guide leading to its modification so that the language, content, order and length were modified. Cohen states: “Clearly they had rapport with their peers based on shared discourse and experience, allowing them to gather information others without the experience of prostitution would have been hard-pressed to secure” (Cohen, 2000, cited in Patton, 2002, p. 399).

### **2.3 Research about effective teaching and learning for Pacific students**

The following review of literature pertaining to Pacific students’ learning predominantly focuses on secondary school students, as this area of schooling is the focus for this thesis research.

In an effort to increase educational success for Pacific youth, successive New Zealand governments, policy makers, educators and researchers have been committed over the past two decades to exploring effective initiatives, interventions, and teaching and learning strategies for Pacific learners (Airini, Anae, Mila-Schaaf & Coxon, 2010; Chu, Glasgow, Rimoni, Hodis & Meyer, 2013; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Hunter & Anthony, 2011). Many, such as Allen, Taleni & Robertson (2009), Carpenter, McMurchy-Pilkington & Sutherland (2000), Fletcher, Parkhill & Harris (2011), Hunter (2007), McDonald & Lipine (2012), Mila-Schaaf & Robinson (2010), Porter-Samuels (2013), Schuster (2008), and Siope (2010), have written about what they have found or espouse to be the essential factors for successful learning and educational progress for Pacific learners. Common themes and findings include:

- the need for teachers to challenge their own cultural assumptions and beliefs

- effective teachers empower active, interactive and independent learners
- an effective curriculum is responsive to the interests and ethnic cultures of learners
- strong connections with students and their families are important for positive learner engagement and achievement, and
- culturally responsive teachers promote identity development.

Some researchers have investigated student perspectives on effective teaching and learning (Amituanai-Toloa, McHaughton, Lai & Airini, 2009; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Ostler-Malaulau, 2008; Otunuku, 2010; Pasikale, 1998; Poskitt, in press; Spiller, 2012). A consistent message throughout the student voice research is that Pacific students are more likely to be engaged in their learning when their teachers have established positive and respectful relationships with them. Martin, Sullivan et al (1998) sought student perspectives about the CRASH programme, a Ministry of Education funded programme for at-risk secondary students in Porirua. Findings from the questionnaires and interviews with students showed what students identified as important tutor characteristics. Rather than ethnicity and age (features common to students and tutors) being ranked as most important, students overwhelmingly identified that tutors who listened to them and “understood where we were coming from” were the most important qualities for a tutor. Similarly the work of Hill and Hawk (2000), carried out as part of the AIMHI Schools project in several low decile Auckland schools, established and promoted the fact that caring and connected relationships were crucial for Māori and Pacific students to succeed at secondary school.

A less formal, but arguably no less worthy, contribution to the body of work which illuminates Pacific student perspectives about effective teaching is the *Pasifex* initiative developed by five senior students at McAuley High School in South Auckland. This group of successful Pacific students have created a website and published an information sheet for teachers which documents how they can support their students to achieve excellence endorsements in the NCEA assessments (Pasifex, n.d.). The dominant message from these high achieving students is that teachers need to ensure students have clarity about their learning as a result of sound explanations and an environment in which they are comfortable to ask questions.

In 2010 a report to the Ministry of Education titled *Teu le Va-Relationships across research and policy in Pasifika education* was published. This work was aimed at “bringing researchers and policy-makers together within a shared agenda and common processes to help provide optimal education outcomes for and with Pasifika learners” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 1). The document highlights and validates the importance of including the voices of Pacific learners and their families within research and policy making. This central premise is captured in one of the three principles around which *Teu le va* is framed:

In summary, Principle two is about the importance of collaborative relationships linking Pasifika learners, their families and communities with Pasifika educational researchers and Pasifika educational policy-makers. *Teu le va* maintains that this can be achieved through research which highlights robust research processes and that maximises the exposing of Pasifika voices, and the issues and concerns of Pasifika learners, their families and communities, so that new knowledge and understandings are generated.

(Ministry of Education, 2010, p.13)

#### **2.4 Talanoa: a research methodology**

The ‘talanoa’ research methodology has become increasingly prominent, used largely by Pacific Island researchers, particularly in the field of education research (Farely & Nabobo-Baba, 2012). Vaioleti (2006) explains the literal Tongan definition of the word ‘talanoa’ as “talking about nothing in particular and interacting without a rigid framework” (p. 23). Farely & Nabobo-Baba further explain that the concept is recognised across the Pacific, including Fiji, Samoa, Niue, Hawaii, the Cook Islands and Tonga. They cite Halapua (2008) who describes it as “engaging in dialogue with, or telling stories to each other absent of concealment of the inner feelings and experiences that resonate in our hearts and minds” (in Farely & Nabobo-Baba, 2012, p. 2).

Farely & Nabobo-Baba attribute the emergence and popularity of ‘talanoa’, as a culturally-appropriate Pacific research methodology, to the work of Sitiveni Halapua and his advocacy for the ‘talanoa’ to be an appropriate mode for conflict resolution following the 2000 coup in Fiji. They assert that ‘talanoa’ is “arguably the most prominent research methodology applied across the Pacific” (p. 2). It is considered to be an appropriate, trustworthy and relevant approach when studying social and educational issues of Pacific nations’ people

(Latu, 2009; Vaioleti, 2006). Vaioleti positions 'talanoa' within the phenomenological research family, as qualitative research linked to grounded theory, naturalistic inquiry and ethnography. As relationships are the foundation on which most Pacific activities are built, this method is ideal because it takes place face to face and removes the distance between the researcher and the participants. Those involved will not open up and share their perspectives until they feel the time is right and the context is appropriate (Latu, 2009; Vaioleti, 2006). It is appropriate to begin 'talanoa' with food and drink, and within the Pacific Island context, kava<sup>4</sup> and gifts are often shared.

## **2.5 Va**

'Talanoa' relates to the concept of the 'va'; the 'va' or 'space that relates' must be cherished and nurtured to establish and maintain the relationships amongst researchers and participants. 'Teu le va' means 'take care of the va' in Samoan. The Samoan notion of 'vafeoloa'i' or 'strong and respectful relationships' is linked to the Samoan concept of 'relational self' which is explicit in New Zealand literature about Samoan well-being (Ministry of Education, 2010). The concept of 'va' as space and relationships between people and things is known across the Pacific; in Tonga, Samoa, Rotuma and Tahiti it is vā, while in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Hawai'i it is known as wā.

## **2.6 Year 9 and 10 secondary students**

The decision to focus on junior secondary school students for this thesis research was partly a practical one: fieldwork would not be likely to interrupt learning and assessment for students on NCEA courses and consequently permission was more likely to be granted from school principals, boards of trustees and parents and caregivers. Additional motivation for working with Year 9 and 10 students came from the findings of middle years schooling literature as well as my personal and professional experience and perspectives about junior secondary education. Research suggests that during the transition years between primary school and senior secondary school, adolescents often experience a decline in achievement and engagement (Cox & Kennedy, 2010; Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2003; Poskitt, in press; Wylie & Hipkins, 2006). Studies also indicate that the

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<sup>4</sup> Kava is a drink made from the roots of the kava plant and is mildly narcotic.

transition to secondary school may be more problematic for Māori and Pacific learners (ERO, 2003; McGee et al, 2003; Wylie et al, 2006). Poskitt explored students' perspectives about learning in the middle years and found that they valued connectedness with and respect from their teachers, curricula that was responsive to their lives outside school and being actively engaged in the learning process. She argues that listening and responding to the voices of middle years' students is vital for increased engagement and achievement.

This thesis research seeks to address some of the gaps in the literature about successful teaching and learning for Pacific students. It contributes findings to the body of New Zealand research that explores Year 9 and 10 Pacific learners' perspectives about effective teaching and learning. Unlike most of the existing studies this one is not based in the upper North Island. In contrast to much of the existing research, this study examines Pacific students' opinions in an open-ended way. The research question – *What do Pacific students say is effective teaching and learning for them?* – is an open question; participants are given a blank canvas rather than have their perspectives sought in order to test or confirm existing theory and ideas. Nowhere in the education literature could I find examples of researchers working alongside “insider” research assistants (RAs) to gather student voice data. This study is innovative because it involves RAs who share similar generational and ethnic cultures with the participants. I chose this strategy because I believed it would lead to more genuine and authentic student voice.

Chapter Three outlines the thesis research design, methodology and underpinning theories and frameworks. It explains the hybrid nature of the research process: traditional western methodologies integrated with a Pacific approach influenced by Samoan and Tongan research methods and values.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and justifies the research design for this thesis study. The interpretivist, case study approach is discussed and the research methods are described. An innovative approach used to enhance the elicitation of student voice is explained, followed by a consideration of research limitations and ethics. The chapter concludes with an articulation of the research stages framed within a Pacific research model.

#### 3.2 Research design

A qualitative, interpretivist framework was selected as the most appropriate approach to explore the voiced perspectives of Pacific students about their schooling. A multi-site case study approach was adopted and strategies for data analysis were guided by grounded theory.

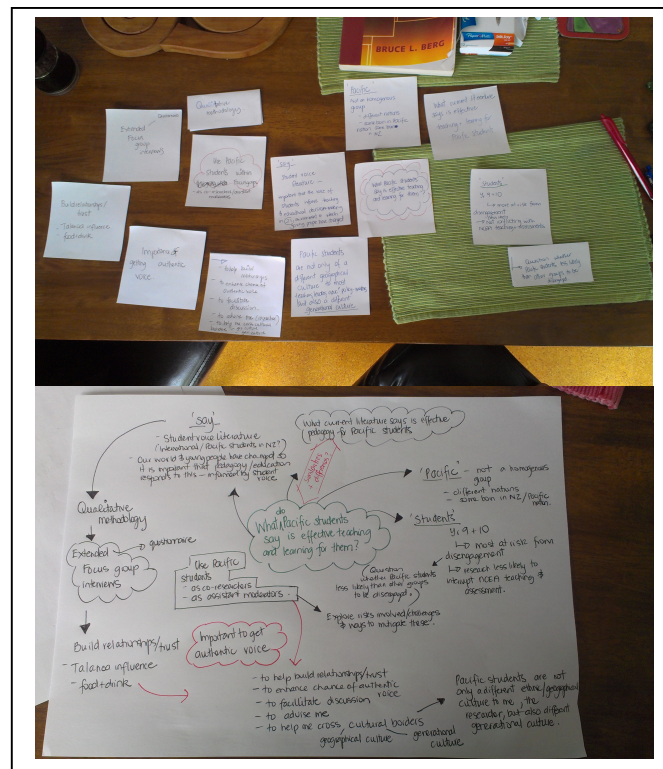
The research design and selection of data gathering techniques were informed by the research problem. Berg (2009), Boeije (2010) and Patton (2002) assert that a clear research question and purpose should direct the entire research project. Certain methods and approaches will be more consonant with particular research problems and questions than others. The purpose of this thesis research is to investigate and discover the perspectives of a group of adolescent Pacific students about effective teaching and learning. It is hoped that discussion and consideration of the research findings, in association with relevant literature, may lead to further research as well as reflection and inquiry by teachers, school leaders and others involved in the education of Pacific learners. The research question is:

*What do Pacific students say is effective teaching and learning for them?*

In the early stages of this project I examined and deconstructed the research question to guide the selection of research methods and relevant literature. Berg (2009) advises novice researchers to use a concept map to organise their ideas and plans as they develop their

research design. He suggests the use of sheets of paper or post-it notes which can be rearranged as ideas are organised and plans devised (Refer Figure 1).

**Figure 1: The generation of a research concept map**



The aim of the study was to generate a theory about Pacific students' perspectives on what helps them to learn. Grounded theory describes the process used to facilitate the development of a theory that is "grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273, cited in Mitra, 2008 p.111). Mitra completed a significant student voice research project at Whitman High School and selected a grounded theory approach because, as she posited, it focused on moving beyond describing the findings to theory development as a result of making connections, describing relationships and investigating patterns of action between the data derived concepts (Mitra, 2008).

A study by Whitburn (2014) bears similarities to this thesis research. Whitburn explored the perspectives of a group of students with vision impairment. The research examines school practices that are designed to be inclusive "yet perpetuate exclusion for students with impaired vision" (p. 3). Whitburn employed a grounded theory framework in which a theory



was generated from the analysis of data. Whitburn asserts that through listening to young people, researchers can highlight their perspectives and develop a theory from the data which enables them to be part of solutions.

### **3.3 Case study approach**

An instrumental, interpretivist, multi-site case study approach was selected for this research. Stake (1994, 1995, cited in Berg, 2009) describes three different types of case study: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Intrinsic case studies are used to investigate the particularity of a single case, rather than to test theory or generate new theoretical explanations. Instrumental case studies are used to gain a broader appreciation of an issue or concern, the case is used to illustrate and provide insights into the issue and develop or refine a theoretical explanation. Instrumental case studies can be more generalisable than intrinsic studies, as the case may or may not be typical of other cases. Shkedi (2005) states that our choice of participants in an instrumental case study is based on their potential to be representative. The selection of the students in this thesis research is described later in this chapter; it was intended that, to some extent, they would be representative of Year 9 and 10 students of Pacific heritage attending New Zealand schools.

This thesis research could also be described as a collective, multiple-case or multi-site case study as it involves groups of participants from three different sites or schools in an attempt to generate a broader appreciation of the research issue. Yin (2003, cited in Berg, 2009) posits that multiple case studies are frequently “considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as more robust” (p.326). Multiple case studies are used to attempt to replicate insights found in individual cases or to explore contrasting situations.

### **3.4 Researcher’s stance**

Berg argues that objectivity in qualitative research is closely linked to reproducibility. Objectivity is enhanced by a researcher who is able to articulate what the procedures are so that others can repeat the research in the same way if they choose. (Berg, 2009). The details, stages and procedures of this thesis research are elucidated throughout chapters three and four, as well as in the appendices. Later in this chapter (sub-heading 3.8) the stages of the investigation are articulated within a Pacific methodological framework.

It should be recognised that my educational training, profession, experiences and personal background, beliefs and values are likely to influence research decisions and interpretations to some extent. An interpretivist approach acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher. Denscombe (2000, cited in Ostler-Malaulau, 2008) posits that case studies are reliable if the researcher's interpretations are correct. Lincoln and Guba (2000, cited in Morrow, 2005) elaborated benchmarks of rigour, or quality standards for interpretivist research. They described them as "parallel criteria" as they run parallel to positivist, quantitative methods of rigour such as reliability and validity. The trustworthiness criteria include credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. Measures taken to enhance standards of trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba) and 'correctness' (Denscombe) of interpretation in this thesis research include:

- participant validation by reviewing transcripts
- triangulation: more than one method of data-gathering and three participant groups, each from a different school setting
- debriefing and feedback from peers (in this case, supervisors and a cultural advisor)
- prolonged immersion in the field: I visited each school at least five times, four of these sessions were with the participants
- a clear description of the stages of the research process, as well as inclusion of findings from relevant research literature, to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer and be generalised.

I suggest that the use of research assistants, similar in age to the participants, enhanced the credibility and dependability of the findings as I posit that as "insiders" they helped me to elicit the genuine perspectives of the respondents during the focus group interview sessions. This approach contributed to the naturalistic (Patton, 2002) stance taken in this thesis research. As Averill (2009) asserts, this is particularly important when the researcher and the researched are not of the same ethnic culture. Naturalist inquiries take place in real world settings; participants are interviewed with open-ended questions in familiar places and under conditions in which they are comfortable (Patton, 2002). This was the case in this thesis research, in fact the school personnel who assisted

with the practicalities of the fieldwork organisation, ensured that the meeting venues were in places where the students were likely to feel comfortable.

Patton's words capture the importance of researchers ensuring the correct balance between objectivity and subjectivity in qualitative research:

The qualitative analyst owns and is reflective about her or his own voice and perspective; a credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness; complete objectivity being impossible and pure subjectivity undermining credibility, the researcher's focus becomes balance-understanding and depicting the world *authentically* in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness.

(Patton, 2002, p. 494)

### 3.5 Research Methods

An extended focus group interview was selected for this study. This qualitative methodology suited the research topic and the research question:

*What do Pacific students say is effective teaching and learning for them?*

However, in order to answer this question as effectively as possible, many considerations and complexities were taken into account.

#### Setting and sampling

As Berg (2009) suggests, it is important to be practical and chose study sites where access is possible and the appropriate people or target population are available. I chose to focus on students in Years 9 and 10 of school. The reason for this is that these two years, following transition from primary school, seem to be the years when students are mostly likely to become disengaged from learning (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; McGee, Ward, Gibbons & Harlow, 2003; Poskitt, in press; Wylie & Hipkins, 2006). In addition, the project is less likely to interfere with any NCEA teaching and assessment, which largely take place in Years 11 to 13.

Participants were students who identified with a Pacific nationality. According to the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, Pacific people in New Zealand are represented by at least 13 distinct cultural groups. More than 60% of New Zealanders who identify as Pacific were born in New Zealand. Pacific people are not an homogenous group but are represented

primarily by Samoan (50%), Cook Islands, Tongan, Niuean, Fijian and Tokelauan groups, with smaller numbers from Tuvalu, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and the small island states of Micronesia (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, n.d.). The research question is not gender specific so similar numbers of male and female students were interviewed. Three focus groups were selected. The initial plan was for four groups of eight students in each. Richard Krueger, recognised as a focus group expert (Patton, 2002), says that six - eight participants is the preferred number (Krueger, 2005). The decision was made to have one focus group at one of the schools instead of two because the informed consent process returned fewer participants than expected, and the logistics of arranging sessions for two sets of questionnaires sessions and focus group interviews proved difficult.

Convenience sampling was used: for practicality and proximity to my home, students were selected from three schools in a North Island city. One group from a girls' school, one from a boys' school, and one mixed gender group from a co-educational school. The schools were all state schools and represented a range of socio-economic communities. A systematic random sampling strategy (Berg, 2009) was used to select the participants. The three schools were asked for a list of all students who fitted the criteria, that is, Year 9 and 10 students who identify with a Pacific nation ethnic group on the school roll. Starting at a randomly selected place on the list every  $n$ th name was selected. Following Berg (2009), the interval between names on the list was determined by dividing the number of students required for the study into the full number of students on the list. Participation in the study was voluntary so those selected using the sampling strategy were given information and consent letters. However, if the numbers who consented to take part were not sufficient for the focus groups then the next  $n$ th student on the list was informed and asked to consent to take part. One school had a particularly small cohort of students who identified as Pacific, so all of this group were given information sheets and asked for consent. For each school there was a staff member who was the contact person for the research, these people assisted in providing the lists of names, year levels and ethnicities of students. For the purposes of this study it was necessary that each student had sufficient oral language and cognitive ability to understand the questionnaire and focus group questions and be able to communicate their responses.

The total numbers of participants, with consent to take part, was 23; 11 in School A, six in School B and 6 in School C. The Pacific nations with which the participants identified were: Samoan: 16, Cook Island Māori: 5, Tongan: 1 and Fijian: 1. There were fifteen Year 9 students and eight Year 10 students overall. Eleven boys and twelve girls participated. I have chosen not to describe the ethnic, age and gender breakdowns of each school group to protect the privacy of those involved. The research assistants (RAs) were aged between fourteen and seventeen, two girls, two boys and all of Samoan heritage.

### Focus Group Interviews

An extended focus group technique was selected for the research. Focus group respected the collective nature of the culture, whereas individual student interviews would have been counter-culture. Moreover, extended focus group interviews respected and embodied the nature of 'va' – creating the space, flexibility and research responsiveness to the evolving conversations amongst the group of students. In order to facilitate reflection and thinking about likely topics in the focus group interviews, participants were given a questionnaire to fill out before coming to the group interviews. It was anticipated that this approach would help participants consider their responses before the group discussion (Berg, 2009). In addition, it assisted the researcher to know about participants' opinions in advance and, as Berg indicates, if necessary, lead the moderator to draw out the contributions of less confident interviewees or those with minority opinions. In focus group discussions there is some risk that the interview is dominated by a small group of people and that participants who tend not to be highly verbal may not readily share their views (Patton, 2002). The moderators (research assistants and researcher) attempted to manage the group well to mitigate this, however, the questionnaires helped to draw out the views of the less verbose participants. Each participant filled in a questionnaire (Refer Appendix A). The questionnaires were distributed before the focus group interviews. In two of the schools this distribution occurred two weeks prior to the focus group interviews. At the third school, students completed the questionnaire directly before the group interview. For a range of reasons, including illness and delay with finalising the participant consent, the questionnaire session at the third school was postponed. To avoid inconveniencing the school and interrupting the students' curriculum, it was decided to combine the data-gathering sessions and ask students to complete the questionnaire before beginning the focus group

interview. In all three schools participants responded to the questions and then handed in the questionnaire forms before leaving. My experience of many years working in schools has taught me that when students are given forms to take away and fill in; usually a number will be lost or not returned so handing in the questionnaire before departure sought to mitigate this risk of non-return. Students did not talk to each other or confer while they filled in the forms. There were very few gaps on the completed questionnaire forms suggesting that each respondent was committed to contributing their perspectives to the study. The readability of the questionnaire was kept simple (approximately a 10 year reading level) however, in case there were students who struggled with literacy, I read the questionnaire to all before handing it out. I was on hand to sensitively assist with the writing if needed, and I emphasised to the students that I was not at all worried about perfect spelling.

As with any data-gathering method, focus group interviews have advantages and limitations. I chose this method because:

- It is culturally appropriate in terms of collaborative discussions and respecting the 'va' (as explained above)
- It is cost-effective and not too time-consuming. "Focus group interviews... produce believable results at a reasonable cost" (Krueger, 1994, cited in Patton, 2002, p.386).
- It has the potential to generate important insights into a topic that previously has not been well understood (Berg, 2009).
- As moderator I can explore topics or aspects of the discussion that have relevance to the research focus but may not have been anticipated (Berg, 2009).
- As Krueger and Casey say, interactions amongst participants may enhance the quality of the data: "Participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weeds out false or extreme views" (Krueger and Casey, 2000, cited in Patton, 2002, p. 386).
- Because of human tendencies to be social animals, participants are likely to enjoy the experience (Patton, 2002). Teenagers, in particular, are likely to enjoy the social dimension of the group interview.

Limitations of the approach that were considered and/or mitigated included:

- A restricted number of questions in the group interviews
- Limited available response time for each participant
- A skilled moderator is needed so that the discussion is not dominated by a few participants
- Those who have an opinion which is not shared by the majority may not contribute
- Focus groups are most successful when the participants are not well known to each other. If they have established relationships the group dynamics become more complex
- Confidentiality cannot be assured (Patton, 2002, p. 389)
- Analysis of the data may be more complex than surveys or individual interviews
- Focus group attendance is voluntary. (Berg, 2009). In a school setting students may feel compelled to come or alternatively, may not attend a planned session.

### **3.6 The challenge of drawing out authentic voice from Pacific students**

It was important that the facilitation of the focus group interviews was skilfully managed so that the students contributed equally and freely to the discussions. However, in order to hear true and meaningful responses from all participants I anticipated that careful interview moderation by me was not enough. It was thought likely that some Pacific students would be reluctant to open up and communicate with an unknown<sup>5</sup> educator. The discussions took place in the students' school environments, and my age, ethnicity and perceived role as a researcher within education may have proven to be a barrier. For successful discussions to elicit student voice it is important that positive relationships are established and a sense of trust fostered (Cook-Sather, 2009). There was a possibility that some students may hold cultural values which compromised their willingness to criticise those in authority, such as their teachers. Patton writes of the challenges that cultural norms and values may present to researchers: "I have experienced cultures where it was simply inappropriate to ask questions of a subordinate about a super-ordinate" (Patton, 2002, p. 393). I was concerned that if the students saw me as an outsider, belonging to both a different age and ethnic culture, reciprocal communication might be impaired. I therefore sought an approach

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<sup>5</sup> Papālagi (or the less formal 'pālagi') is the Samoan word to describe a Pākehā, European or Caucasian person.

which helped me, as the researcher, cross both the generational and the ethnic culture borders.

Support from 'insider' research assistants and the employment of a talanoa approach for the focus group interviews were adopted as strategies to address the challenges above. Four Pacific students aged 14 – 17 years, were trained to be co-moderators or 'insider' research assistants (RAs). These young people assisted with interactions with the student participants. They also had an advisory role to enable aspects of the research to be critiqued and modified to suit the Pacific student participants. During the focus group interviews they connected easily with the participants and demonstrated natural empathy and understanding, sometimes sharing their own experiences. These young people facilitated the discussions; during a training session I had with them we discussed the likely questions and the aim of the group interviews. A prompt sheet was used with key words related to the questions, to guide the RAs as they led the discussions. I suggest that the student participants spoke more readily and genuinely about their experiences and perspectives because of the presence of the RAs. This would be an interesting area for further research. Limitations related to this strategy are discussed later in this chapter. Further discussion related to 'insider' research is included in Chapter Two.

The focus group discussions employed aspects of the talanoa<sup>6</sup> approach. The early stage of the meeting involved food, drink and conversation which helped to build relationships. This aspect of talanoa is based on the premise that many Pacific people will not open up and share personal opinions until they feel they can trust those they are conversing with. The sharing of food and personal stories helps inter-personal connections to form and conversation to flow.

Berg describes focus group interviews as a short series of discussions, sparked by questions from the moderator, organised in a similar manner to a semi-standardised interview (2009). Questions may be predetermined and presented in a systematic order but participants have

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<sup>6</sup> Talanoa is a term used in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji and other Pacific Island nations to describe a particular form of meeting or talk. It has been adopted by some Pacific researchers to describe a research methodology. Refer Chapter Two for a full explanation.



the freedom to digress. The moderator is able to probe beyond the answers given to the set questions. Standardised questions should be formulated in a vernacular familiar to the participants. The Pacific student RAs assisted me with the possible wording of the questions, and in actual fact, they translated and elaborated on the questions during the group interviews, using a vernacular shared with the student participants. For example there was much use of the terms “you guys” and “like”.

Krueger makes the following suggestions about questions that yield powerful information:

- Use open-ended questions
- Avoid using “why?” but ask about attributes and influences
- Use “think back” questions that take people back to an experience not forward to the future
- Use different types of questions such as: opening (round robin), introductory, transition, key and ending questions
- Use questions that get people involved such as reflection, examples, choices, rating scales, drawings
- Focus the questions, use a sequence that goes from general to specific (Krueger (2005)).

An example of a “think back” question used by an RA in the focus group interview was: “Is there a time when you struggled heaps and that teacher helped you to understand what you guys are learning?” (FGI transcript: School B, September, 2014).

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

I used an inductive process to analyse the data. In keeping with Abrahamson’s description of inductive reasoning I immersed myself in the data in order to identify the key ideas and themes that seemed meaningful to the producers of the messages, that is, the research participants (Abrahamson, 1989, in Berg, 2009). Berg suggests that inductive analysis is important for research which seeks to capture the voices of participants. The researcher must rely more strongly on induction so she or he can present the perceptions of the participants in a forthright manner (Berg, 2009).

The first step in the analysis of the data was to work through the typed transcripts of the focus group interviews and assign a code to each participant response. I generated a list of codes as I worked through the transcripts. Taylor-Powell & Renner (2003) describe this as emergent categories: categories are defined as a result of working with the data. I chose not to use preconceived categories, but rather, inductive category development where the categories flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Three initial categories were derived from the responses: Relationships (R); Pedagogy (P): teacher practice – what they did; Dispositions (D): attributes or behaviours of the teachers which did not fit easily into the pedagogy or relationships categories but were related to teachers' personal characteristics. Each response was allocated a letter and a number (Refer to Appendix I). For example: *The teacher gets along with me* = R1, *Explains until I understand* = P4. As I proceeded with the data analysis and presentation of the results, the three broad categories of relationships, pedagogy and dispositions became redundant; the generation of theory and production of the findings emerged more logically in response to the discrete codes, such as *The teacher gets along with me*. Once the data was coded I began the task of manually sorting and counting the codes. A running total was kept of the number of student responses that corresponded to a particular code, in order to determine the most to least frequent codes (Refer to Appendix J). A tally process was used for each of the data gathering tools. This stage of the data analysis could be described as quantitative as I sought to count and rank the frequency of each code. This was a key step in building the theory and establishing what the Pacific students said was most important to help them learn.

### **3.8 Limitations of this thesis research**

All research is susceptible to limitations as a result of the possible effects that study design, data gathering and analysis methods may have on the findings (Patton, 2002). Possible limitations related to the focus group interview method are described above. This section discusses further limitations of the research.

Twenty three Pacific students took part in this study. The participants were all from schools in a North Island city and not necessarily representative of schools in other regions of New Zealand, including rural areas. The small sample size reduces the generalisability of the findings. With research based on a participant sample of this size, it is difficult to say that

the views expressed and shared by the students in this study are truly representative of the perspectives of other Year 9 and 10 Pacific students. A larger sample was beyond the scope of this Masters' level research. In addition, the participants were not all of one national ethnicity, but were drawn from a range of Pacific Island cultures. Some students identified with other ethnic cultures as well as those of Pacific nations. It is possible that some were not born in New Zealand, while others had parents who were born in New Zealand and some may have had families who have resided in this country for two or more generations. A limitation of this thesis research, including the research question *What do Pacific students say is effective teaching and learning for them?*, is the assumption that Pacific students are an homogenous group. Seventy percent of the participant group were of Samoan descent as were all four of the RAs. This was unintentional as random sampling was used to select participants. The make-up of the group may reflect the fact that Samoan people are the largest Pacific Island national group living in New Zealand (Ministry of Pacific Islands Affairs, n.d.). There is a risk that the dominance of this ethnic group may influence the research findings. In order to mitigate against the effects of a small, heterogeneous (but Samoan dominated) sample, the research findings were compared and considered with recent and relevant literature about Pacific students' learning and many similarities were found. This idea is developed further in Chapter Five.

To a certain extent, my ethnic cultural background (New Zealand European/Papālagi) was a limitation for research involving participants of Pacific heritage. However, advice and assistance from my Samoan cultural advisor and research assistants helped to mitigate limitations related to culture.

Secondary school students were selected to be research assistants and given some training to effectively facilitate the focus group interviews. The benefits of this approach are explained above, however there is a chance that this strategy limited the authenticity and validity of the findings. At times there was a tendency for the RAs to ask leading and closed questions which may have provoked participants to agree to ideas that they may not have volunteered otherwise. Sometimes a question was asked but not followed by enough silence for the participants to think and offer their responses. The RAs occasionally shared their own experiences, which on the one hand may have enhanced the empathetic and

genuine nature of the conversation, but on the other hand their words may have influenced the participants. I attempted to mitigate this after the first focus group interview by speaking with some of the RAs about balancing an independent stance with an empathetic approach and suggesting that they leave more wait time after questions to allow participants, particularly the quieter ones, to contribute.

Interpretivist, qualitative research approaches that attempt to capture participants' perspectives are limited to a certain extent when the researcher analyses data. How can we actually know that what respondents say, as interpreted by the researcher, is what the participants mean? Fielding cites Mitra's illustration of the pitfalls of adult interpretation of student voice. She found that "when adults analysed the data, they translated 'student speak' into adult words that did not always have the same meaning. Having ... the students at the table preserved the integrity in the student voices by ensuring the adults understood the issues students felt were most important" (Mitra (n.d.), cited in Fielding, 2001, p. 102). In this thesis research participants were asked to clarify some of their responses if the researcher or research assistant was uncertain about their exact meaning. This happened both during the focus group interviews and during a later check-in session.

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

As Berg (2009) reminds us, the fundamental ethical principle pertaining to research within the social sciences is do no harm. Guided by the ethical principles of the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations using Human Participants (2013), as well as the work of Alderson (1995) and Hill (2005) about research with children (both cited in Punch, 2009), key ethical considerations for this study were:

- **Respect for all persons involved**, including student participants, their teachers, student research assistants (RAs). Privacy and confidentiality was adhered to, with students reminded before and during the focus group sessions to respect the privacy and mana of others. They were asked not to refer to anyone outside of the group in a way which identified them (for example their teachers). Audio and written records of the interviews and questionnaires were confidential to the researcher, RAs and the researcher's Massey University supervisors. They are stored securely. The

researcher was committed to maintaining social and cultural sensitivity at all times. This included awareness of, and respect for, the various Pacific cultures of the participants. Collaboration with the Pacific student RAs and their families helped the researcher refine the research design and sensitively and effectively facilitate the focus group discussions.

- **Welfare and beneficence** - the purpose of the research is to contribute to a body of knowledge which is intended to benefit Pacific learners. On a small scale the participants may possibly benefit from the study's findings should they be read or used by staff at the students' school. Involvement in this research gave participants opportunities to reflect on and discuss their learning. There is a chance that this experience contributed to increased confidence for the participants to communicate their learning preferences to their teachers, families and schools. The researcher was responsive to the student participants' wishes and needs with the intention of minimising harm at all times. The researcher had teacher registration.
- **Informed and voluntary consent** was sought from students and, for those under 15, from their parents or guardians. Students were able to opt out at any time. Communication about the project was in a format that participants and their families could understand. Information and consent letters were translated into Samoan for those that requested them.
- **Conflict of interest** for the researcher is unlikely as all attempts were made to use robust, reliable, valid and trustworthy data gathering and analysis methods to obtain objective findings. The goal of this research is that the findings will contribute to research which informs successful teaching practice for Pacific students.

The requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee are thorough and are intended to provide protection for participants and all involved in research. There are a number of rights related to the student participants which are detailed on the informed consent forms given to all prospective participants (refer to Appendix B ). The information sheets and consent forms were translated into Samoan and made available to any students who wanted them (Appendices C & D). Participants did not take part in the research unless a signed copy of the consent form had been received (Appendix E). The research assistants

received information sheets and signed consent forms (Appendices F & G) and the principals of the participating schools gave their informed consent (Appendix H).

### **3.10 Stages of the investigation**

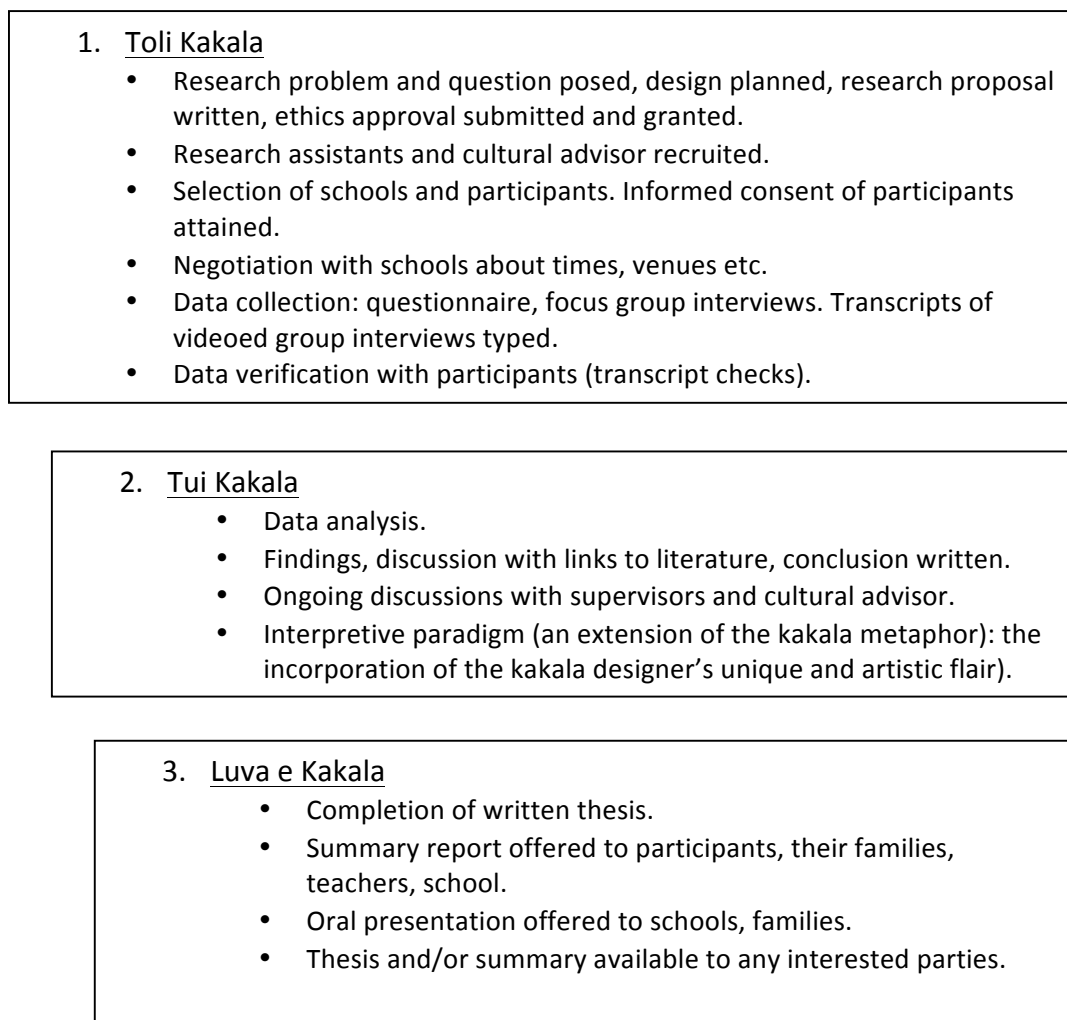
In order to enhance reliability, replicability and trustworthiness of research, Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Denscombe, 2005) suggest that researchers clearly document an audit trail which shows the stages of their investigation and the decision process from the conception of the research to the findings and discussion. Mitra (2008) makes the assertion that many qualitative research studies do not make the procedures from research question to final conclusions explicit. She advocates for candid and thorough records of how research is conducted from beginning to end.

This process for this thesis research is outlined below. I have chosen to frame it within the Tongan research methodology of 'kakala'. The kakala model was developed by Konai Helu-Thaman (1997, cited in Vaoletti, 2006). She uses the metaphor of the kakala (or 'lei' in Samoa and Hawaii, 'ei' in the Cook Islands and 'salusalu' in Fiji) which is the woven garland of fragrant flowers and leaves. It has special significance, protocols and mythology associated with its formation, giving and wearing. The flowers are selected, arranged and woven together to suit the occasion for which they are made. Helu-Thaman uses the stages of the kakala to describe a research process. The 'toli kakala' describes the search, selection and picking of the flowers and leaves at the most appropriate time. Many skills are needed to collect the required flowers and greenery; the gatherers need to know about the correct locations, texture, maturity, colour and fragrance of the various plants. Helu-Thaman associates the 'toli kakala' with the recognition of a research problem and the creation of the research question and design within a traditional western research. It equates to the stages of participant selection and data gathering. 'Tui kakala' is the process of weaving the garland and this involves sorting, grouping and arranging the flowers according to their cultural significance. Skill is required, not only to weave the kakala but also to the arrangement and combinations of flowers and the designer may incorporate their own artistic flair. This stage relates to the data analysis, discussion and conclusions of research. The processes and skill of the researcher can determine the authenticity, relevance and usefulness of the research findings. The 'kau tui kakala', or people involved in putting the

garland together, are knowledgeable about traditional methods and processes and they comment on the correctness of the design and presentation in the much the same way that a research student works together with his/her supervisors, receiving and responding to feedback. Finally the 'luva e kakala' is the completion of the garland which is then gifted to someone for a special occasion. Vaioloeti (2006) explains the importance of the 'luva' "in the context of Polynesian values of "ofa' (love, compassion), 'faka'apa'apa' (respect) and 'fetokoni'aki' (reciprocity and responsibility for each other)" (p. 27).

Helu-Thaman (1997, cited in Vaioloeti, 2006) relates this final process to the completion, presentation and distribution of the research and its findings. It is the stage when the information is returned to the participants, community, scholars and those that may find it useful. Figure 2 details the stages of this thesis research within a kakala framework.

**Figure 2: Stages of the Investigation within a kakala framework**



In Chapter Four the research are presented. The findings from the focus group interviews, including the post-it exercise, and the questionnaires are examined. The data is then triangulated to enable the most frequent responses to be presented as a list of the top ten factors which contribute to effective teaching and learning for Pacific students.



## Chapter Four

### Results

#### 4.1 Introduction

Presented in this chapter are the research findings from the data collection in the three secondary schools. Collated focus group interview data are examined and analysed in the first section. This section also includes an explanation of the coding and analysis system used to organise the data.

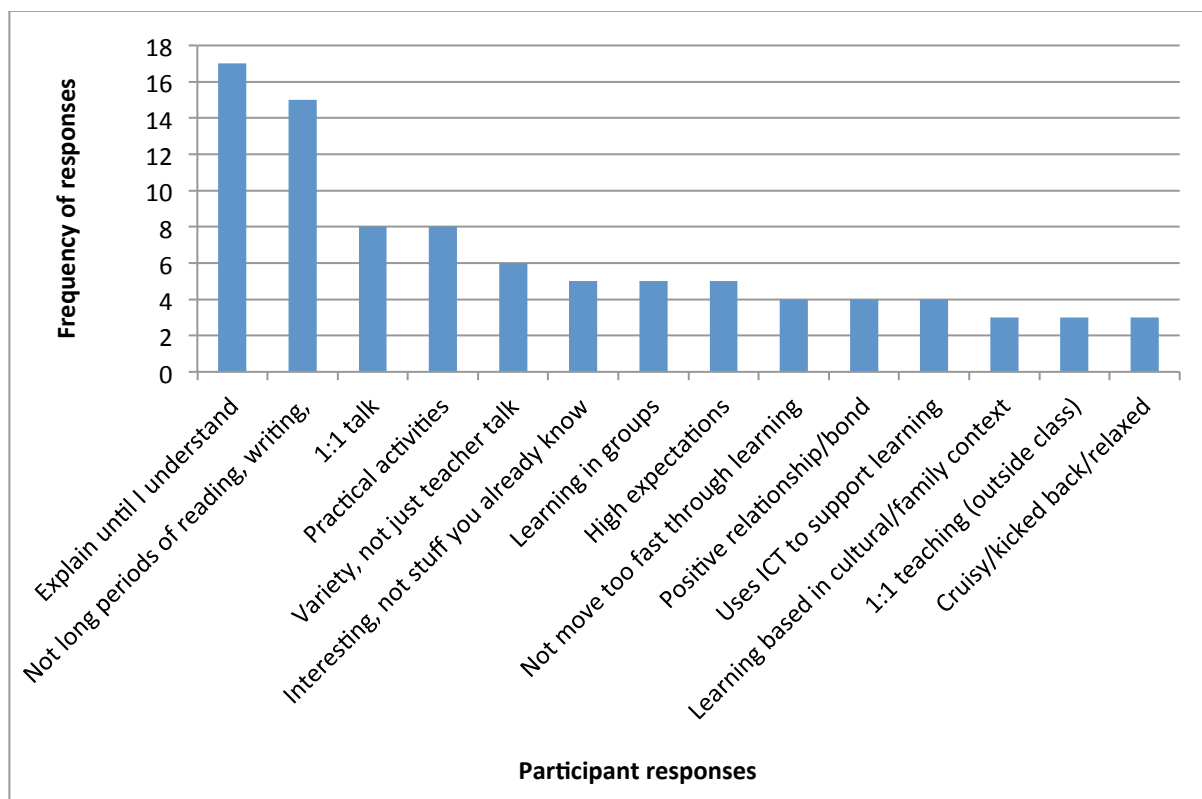
The results from the post-it exercise are presented. These reveal what the participants believe are the most important 'effective teacher qualities'. The final section deals with the results from the questionnaires.

#### 4.2 Focus Group Interviews

The first step in the analysis of the data was to work through the typed transcripts of the focus group interviews and assign a code to each participant response. I generated a list of codes as I worked through the transcripts. Taylor-Powell & Renner (2003) describe this as emergent categories: categories are defined as a result of working with the data. I chose not to use preconceived categories but, rather, inductive category development where the categories flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Three categories were derived from the responses: Relationships (R); Pedagogy (P): teacher practice – what they did; Dispositions (D): attributes or behaviours of the teachers which did not fit easily into the pedagogy or relationships categories but were related to teachers' personal characteristics.

Each response was allocated a letter and a number (Refer to Appendix I). For example: *The teacher gets along with me* = R1, *Explains until I understand* = P4. A running total was kept of the number of student responses that corresponded to a particular code, in order to determine the most to least frequent codes. (Refer to Appendix J). The data from the three schools was combined and presented in a bar graph to show the frequency of responses (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Focus Group Interviews: Frequency of participant responses**



As the graph above shows, the most common response within the focus group interviews was *Explain until I understand*. Across the three interviews this teacher strategy was mentioned 17 times.

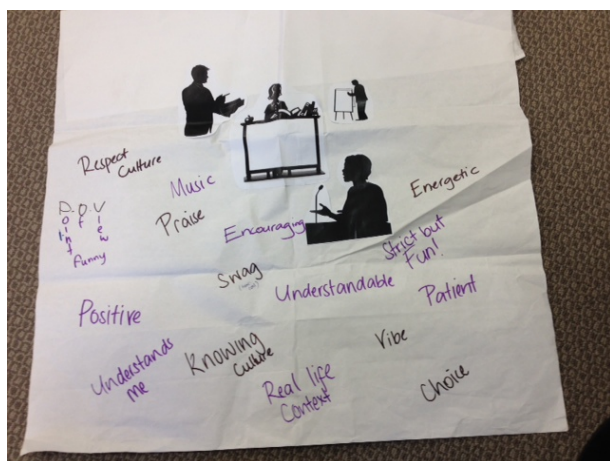
The next most common code which had a frequency score of 15 was: *Not long periods of reading, writing and listening*. Responses that were grouped under this code included various comments which referred to disengagement due to long periods of note-taking, copying from the board, listening to the teacher talk or sustained periods of reading. It is very closely related to *Variety, not just teacher talk* which had a frequency score of six.

The next most popular codes, each with a score of eight, were *Practical Activities* and *1:1 talk* (with the teacher). All the characteristics and strategies included in the graph were mentioned at least three times.

### 4.3 Post-its exercise: Student top 3 descriptors of effective teaching

At the end of each focus group interview the student participants were asked to share single words or phrases which described their ideal teacher. This was done in a brainstorm fashion with one of the research assistants writing up the words on a chart as the participants called them out (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: The ideal teacher brainstorm exercise**



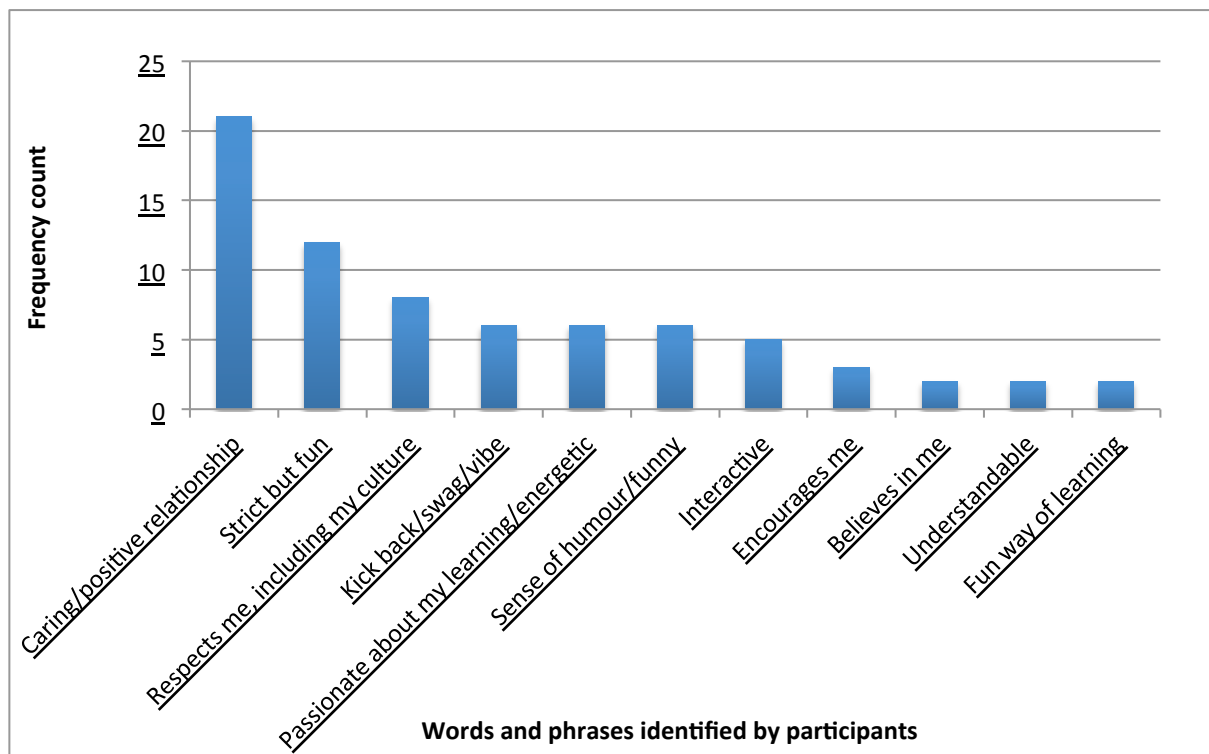
Post-it stickers were given out and participants were then asked to select just three characteristics from the chart: the three qualities they thought were the most important for an effective teacher who helps them learn. The analysis of this data was by frequency count, that is, the number of times a concept was written on a post-it.

**Table 1: Most important qualities for an ideal teacher**

Concepts	School A	School B	School C	Totals
Caring/positive/understanding relationship	7	8	7	21
Strict but fun	6	2	4	12
Respects me, including my culture	4	2	2	8
Kicked back/swag/vibe	3	3	0	6
Passionate about my learning/energetic	3	3	0	6
Sense of humour/funny	1	3	2	6
Interactive	0	0	5	5
Encourages me/praise	3	0	0	3
Understandable	2	0	0	2
Fun way of learning	0	1	1	2

The graph below (Figure 5) shows that 21 of the responses from the 25 student participants identified that teachers who had *caring, positive and understanding relationships* with their students were likely to be effective and help students learn. The next most selected attribute was *strict but fun*. This phrase was written on two of the three charts and was selected by ten students in total; the third chart had the word *strict* and received two votes. *Respect me, including my culture* was identified by 8 students.

**Figure 5: Most important qualities for an effective teacher (Post-it exercise)**



#### 4.4 Questionnaires

The questionnaires were distributed before the focus group interviews. Students answered questions related to effective teachers as well as effective and enjoyable lessons.

The first question was an introductory, warm-up type question and asked students to list their favourite subjects at school. The participants could list any number of subjects. Table 2 shows the most popular subjects. 23 students responded to this question.

**Table 2: Most popular subjects**

Physical Education	Social Studies	Mathematics	Science	English
14	11	11	6	5

The subjects that were mentioned only one to four times each are option or short course (module) subjects. It is interesting to note that English is significantly less popular than Mathematics and Social Studies. Although data was not collected for this study about languages spoken at home, it is likely that some of the participants have a language other than English as their first language. In addition several may have parents and caregivers for whom English is not their first language. For some of these students the subject of English may present challenges related to their levels of literacy and stage of English language learning. These factors could have influenced the subject's lesser rating.

The most common reasons that students gave for enjoying the subjects they listed as their favourites were:

- Interest in the subject content (8 mentions)
- I'm good at it (7)
- Great/awesome teacher (e.g. nice, makes sure we understand) (6)
- I like being active (5)
- Teacher makes lessons fun (4)

The remainder of the questionnaire responses were coded, using the same coding framework as the focus group interviews (Refer to Appendix I). As new categories emerged new codes were generated. For example: *Doesn't let anyone feel left out*: R39. (Refer to Appendix A for the questionnaire transcripts and Appendix J for the table showing frequency of responses).

Question 5 asks: *What gets in the way of your learning? What stops you from learning?* When coding the responses to this question the assumption was made that the opposite of *what stops you from learning* is *what helps you to learn* so the participant responses were

‘flipped’ or inverted to fit a code showing what the participants thought promoted their learning. For examples see Table 3.

**Table 3:**

<u>Response to: <i>What stops you from learning?</i></u>	<u>In order to show: <i>What helps you to learn?</i></u> <u>Coded as:</u>
<i>When I am struggling and teachers don't help me because they are busy</i>	<i>Helps me.</i>
<i>When teachers have favourites</i>	<i>Treats students equally</i>
<i>When teachers are too serious and don't know what fun is</i>	<i>Funny, uses humour</i>

**Figure 6: Questionnaire Responses**

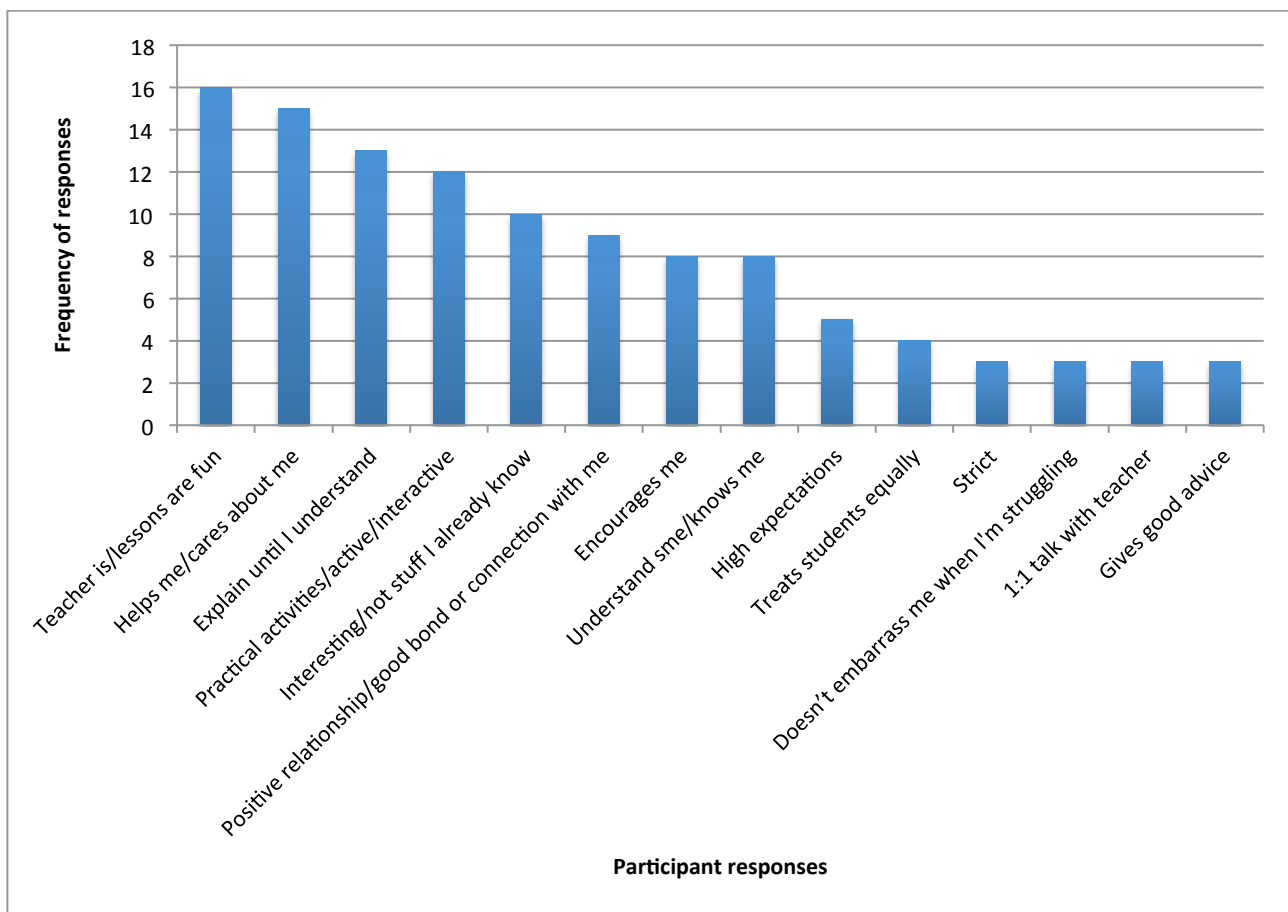


Figure 6 shows the frequency of responses. The codes were tallied (Appendix K) and the ideas that were mentioned three or more times are graphed above.

The idea most commonly referred to in the questionnaire was: *The teacher is or the lesson is fun*. This received 16 mentions. In a questionnaire format it is difficult for the researcher to explore what the respondents mean by the rather abstract and elusive word *fun*. However, the word *fun* was explored in both the focus group interviews and in the check-in session when the researcher returned to the schools for the participants to check the interview transcripts. In this latter session students were asked by the researcher: 'Tell me more about what you mean by fun' to which they replied:

- *When teachers make the learning interesting*
- *Games*
- *They don't make you just sit and listen*
- *Their attitude has to be fun too-they are really happy, smile*
- *They listen*
- *Activities*
- *Less talking (teacher)*
- *Movies*
- *Music*

The next most common response in the questionnaires referred to a teacher who *helps me/cares about me*. This was referred to 15 times. Following this *Explain until I understand* and *practical/active/interactive activities* each received more than 10 mentions.

It is interesting to note that the concepts related to relationships and teachers' affective attributes are less common in the focus group interview responses than the questionnaire and post-it selection exercise. This could be related to the designs of the interview and questionnaire schedules and the questions. Alternatively it could have been influenced by the following:

- students were less likely to talk about more personal and emotional ideas in a public forum but more likely to identify affective attributes when answering privately and in writing

- the quieter, more shy students who may particularly value positive, caring and nurturing teachers and possibly benefit more from nurturing relationships were less likely to share their ideas in a public forum.

#### **4.5 Data triangulation**

Having completed the summary and analysis of findings for each data-gathering method I analysed the results for each school by combining the findings from each method (Refer Table 4). This was largely a quantitative exercise as I totalled the concepts and responses that had featured most commonly in each of the three methods. Some categories were combined into a higher order code. For example, *A teacher who is supportive, helpful, connects with me and understands me* was made up of five discrete categories: *Teacher who helps me/cares about me* and *understands me* and *understanding* and *positive relationship* and *teacher: student bond*.

Having collated the individual school findings in a systematic analysis grid (Table 4) I could identify the key themes for each school. The numbers represent the frequency of each response. When these key themes from each school were combined it became very clear which concepts were most often referred to by the student participants.



**Table 4: Individual School Summaries**

Most frequent responses (3 or more):

	<b>FGI</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Post-its</b>	<b>Key themes for each school</b>
<b>School A</b>	<p>Not long periods of reading, writing or listening: 7</p> <p>1:1 talk: 4</p> <p>1:1 talk but not in class (teacher tutoring): 3</p> <p>Practical activities: 3</p> <p>Interesting: not stuff you already know: 3</p> <p>Variety: not just teacher talk: 3</p> <p>Positive relationship/ teacher-student bond: 3</p> <p>Teacher treats students equally: 3</p> <p>Teacher encourages/pushes you: 3</p>	<p>Teacher who helps me/cares about me: 11</p> <p>Positive relationship/ teacher-student bond: 8</p> <p>Practical activities/ active/ interactive: 8</p> <p>Explain until I understand: 7</p> <p>Interesting: not stuff you already know: 7</p> <p>Lessons are fun: 5</p> <p>Teacher encourages/pushes you: 5</p> <p>Understands me/knows me: 4</p> <p>Teacher treats students equally: 3</p> <p>High expectations: 3</p> <p>Gives good advice: 3</p>	<p>Strict but fun: 6</p> <p>Understands me/ understanding: 4</p> <p>Respect Culture: 3</p> <p>Energetic: 3</p>	*(see below)
<b>School B</b>	<p>Explain until I understand: 9</p> <p>High expectations: 4</p> <p>Doesn't move too fast through learning: 3</p> <p>1:1 talk: 3</p> <p>Not long periods of reading, writing or listening: 3</p>	<p>Explain until I understand: 4</p> <p>Lessons are fun: 4</p> <p>Understands me/knows me: 4</p> <p>Doesn't embarrass me when I'm struggling: 3</p>	<p>Helps you/ supportive/caring/ nice: 6</p> <p>Kick back: 3</p> <p>Passionate about your learning: 3</p> <p>Sense of humour 3</p>	
<b>School C</b>	<p>Explain until I understand: 7</p> <p>Not long periods of reading, writing or listening: 5</p> <p>Practical activities:4</p>	<p>Lessons are fun: 7</p>	<p>Interactive: 5</p> <p>Strict but fun: 4</p> <p>Understands me: 4</p>	
See graphs of combined results for each data-gathering tool				

For both the FGI and the questionnaires, School C had many responses that featured only once or twice so are not shown in Table 4. They were, however, included in the totalled responses which are represented in the graphs above.

**Table 5: \*Key themes for each school**

	Teacher	Lessons
School A (Co-ed, low decile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supportive, helpful, connects with me and understands me</li> <li>• Strict but fun</li> <li>• Explains until I understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun and involve practical, interactive or active learning experiences</li> </ul>
School B (Girls, high decile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explains until I understand</li> <li>• Supportive and helpful and understands me/knows me</li> <li>• High expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun, not long periods of reading, writing, listening</li> </ul>
School C (Boys, mid decile)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strict, but understands me and explains until I understand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fun, interactive and practical</li> </ul>

Repeated concepts:

From Table 5 the most repeated responses can be identified. The two most frequent responses related to teacher attributes and behaviours were:

- Supportive, helpful
- Explains until I understand

The next most frequently mentioned teacher attributes were:

- Understands me
- Strict

In relation to lessons, students across the three schools talked most frequently about lessons being:

- Fun
- Practical, interactive or active learning experiences – not long periods of listening, writing, reading

#### 4.6 What Pacific Students say is effective teaching and learning for them: The Top 10

Table 6 displays the combined frequency of responses across the three data-gathering tools. The numbers in brackets represent the number of responses that were coded to the category.

**Table 6: The Top 10 teacher qualities, behaviours and strategies**

	Teacher	Lesson
1	Caring/positive relationship (44)	
2	Explain until I understand (30)	
3		Not long periods of teacher talk, note-taking or reading (21)
4		Practical activities (20)
5		Fun (16)
6		Interesting: not stuff I already know (15)
7	Strict but fun (8)	
8	Respects me, including my culture (8)	
9	Talks 1:1 with me (8)	
10	Encourages me (8)	

It is clear from this information that most of the students in the study thought teachers who established positive and caring relationships and who were good at explaining current learning were the most effective. Students identified lessons that were fun, interesting, varied and practical helped them to learn. Several students also thought good teachers were strict, encouraging, talked to them individually, and respected them and their culture.

When the student participants talked in the focus group interviews about teachers who they believed were ineffective in helping them to learn they described teachers who lacked these positive attributes and who taught lessons that were boring and slow. Their impressions of ineffective teachers are presented in Table 7 below.

**Table 7: Student perspectives about ineffective teachers**

Concept	Examples of interview comments
Too much note taking and teacher talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Just note taking. It takes like half a period.</i></li> <li>• <i>Writing notes for the whole lesson.</i></li> <li>• <i>Don't do practical stuff.</i></li> <li>• <i>The talking (teacher).</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, they just talk and talk and talk and talk.</i></li> <li>• <i>They talk too much.</i></li> <li>• <i>They probably have a whole power point and make you write it all down.</i></li> </ul>
Teachers who don't explain new learning well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The teacher just writes stuff on the board and you copy it, without really explaining what it is.</i></li> <li>• <i>And if you're having like a brain cramp and you don't know what to do.</i></li> <li>• <i>They don't explain things thoroughly.</i></li> <li>• <i>When they don't take things slow.</i></li> <li>• <i>They say stuff that are confusing.</i></li> </ul>
Low expectations and racist attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>They underestimate your abilities.</i></li> <li>• <i>And then if you wanna like ask for help then the teachers might look down to you and your abilities and stuff, and they might try and, like, make you feel dum or something.</i></li> <li>• <i>Not really pushing you to your fullest. When they look at you, like you can't do that and then you start to think, oh I can't do that.</i></li> <li>• <i>Yeah, because they base you on your stereotype- like what they know of a stereotype Samoan.</i></li> <li>• <i>A teacher who is racist. There's like white people on this side, white people on this side. They pick you out like the holocaust. (referring to teacher's seating plan)</i></li> </ul>

There is clear alignment between the pedagogical and personal characteristics that the students identified as present for effective teachers and missing for ineffective teachers. Participants spoke of teachers that failed to help them learn because they didn't respect them or have high expectations for their success. They said ineffective teachers didn't explain learning well and did not deliver interesting and varied lessons.

#### 4.7 Conclusion

Each of the three data-gathering methods clearly identified teacher attributes and types of learning that the participants believed helped them to learn. Analysis of the focus group interviews revealed the most important respondent-identified factor for effective learning was a teacher who took time to explain concepts and learning material until the students clearly understood the material. Many students also articulated lessons that contained long periods of copying from the board, reading or listening to the teacher talking were not conducive to learning.

The post-it exercise produced findings that showed that participants valued teachers who established positive and caring relationships with students and who could be strict and fun at the same time. The questionnaires found that *fun* was a popular descriptor for effective teachers and lessons and participants believed teachers who helped and cared about them were important for learning success.

The systematic analysis grid (Table 4) facilitated the identification of the key findings for each school. A tally of all the times each coded response was mentioned resulted in a list of the top ten teacher qualities, strategies and behaviours.

The next chapter will examine these top ten teacher attributes which the students in this study say are necessary for effective teaching and learning.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion

#### 5.1 Introduction

The findings reported in chapter five revealed Pacific student perspectives about teaching and learning. In this chapter key ideas are drawn out and analysed in further depth and their significance is considered in the light of wider research. The discussion is structured around the top ten teacher qualities, behaviours and strategies that are necessary for effective teaching and learning according to the Pacific student participants in this study.

#### 5.2 Caring and connected relationships

*The way they are to us, it's like bondable, you bond good.*

The perspectives of the Pacific students in this study affirm the importance of positive connections fostered by caring and empathetic teachers to promote student engagement and learning success. The research findings show a marked difference between the frequency-counts of students' responses which related to positive, supportive relationships compared to the frequency of all other types of responses. That is, comments and selected concepts about positive teacher-student connections were much more common than other types of comments. This was particularly the case when students were giving written, individual and more discrete responses in the questionnaire and post-it exercises (Refer Figures 3 and 4).

Students often described positive connections with teachers who were empathetic, listened to them and understood them, as the following comments show:

*Teacher that gets you, understands you.*

*Teachers that (get) down to your level, point of view.*

*When they understand you.*

*They actually come and talk to you.*

*They like, listen to what you have to say.*

*They actually listened to me.*

Students appreciated teachers who were supportive and helpful. Particularly when they felt that the teacher went out of their way to help them. As one student articulated:

*They listen to me, understand me and help me. (They) understand the things I find difficult. They go out of their way to help me.*

Another student wrote:

*She understood how hard it was to learn as a Pacific Islander. She went out of her way to help others as well.*

Several New Zealand studies similarly argue that positive, respectful connections between teachers and students are necessary for enhanced educational success for Pacific learners (Averill 2012; Martin, Sullivan et al, 1998; Ostler-Malaulau, 2009; Pasikale, 1998; Poskitt, (in press); Samu, 2006; Spiller, 2013).

Hill and Hawk (2000) describe teachers found to be effective in the AIMHI project as caring and giving of themselves. This included giving extra personal time to students, supporting them with personal problems and in co-curricular activities.

The words of a Year 10 male focus group participant resonate with the findings of Spiller's (2013) research. She found that disrespectful student behaviour and disengagement only occurred in the classrooms of teachers who had poor relationships with their Pacific students.

*If I don't get along with the teacher then I don't have a good lesson.*

Student perspectives about the importance of relationships reflect the findings of significant and longitudinal New Zealand research that has explored what Māori and Pacific students believe supports their successful learning. The *Te Kotahitanga* project responded to the perspectives of Māori students and ensured a strong focus on supporting teachers to foster positive, respectful relationships with their students (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Alton-Lee's

(2014) report about the impact of the programme demonstrates that the achievement of Māori students from Phase Five *Te Kotahitanga* schools improved at around three times the rate of Māori in comparison schools (Alton-Lee, 2014). She concludes that *Whakawhanaungatanga* was one of the critical success factors.

An examination of schooling improvement work that has enhanced Pacific student achievement in Auckland schools is reported by Amituanai-Tolosa et al (2009). Their work captures the voices of Pacific students and draws comparisons to the student perspectives conveyed through the *Te Kotahitanga* research. Pacific students spoke about positive teacher relationships and the sense of teachers being like family.

In a synthesis of research about effective teaching for Māori and Pacific learners Hawk, Cowley et al (2002) found: 'The dominant theme that emerged independently from all projects is the critical importance of the relationship between the teacher and the learner' (p. 1). Each of three individual studies found that teaching was more likely to be effective, and students more actively engaged, when there was a positive relationship between the teachers and students.

Furthermore, Alton-Lee's Best Evidence Synthesis (2003) identified one of the ten research-based characteristics needed for quality teaching practices for diverse students was: 'Pedagogical practices enable classes and other learning groupings to work as caring, inclusive, and cohesive learning communities'. (Alton-Lee, 2003 p. vi). She asserted that effective teachers ensure that their practices and interactions with students result in caring and supportive classroom learning contexts. Martin, Sullivan et al (1998) describe similar sentiments offered by student participants in their research almost twenty years ago. Rather than ethnicity and age being ranked as most important, students overwhelmingly identified that tutors who listened to them and 'understood where we were coming from' were the most important qualities for a tutor. Hawk & Hill (2000) and Ostler-Malaulau (2009) similarly found that teachers' 'inward qualities' (Martin et al, 1998) were more important to students than teachers who shared the same ethnic culture. Ezra Schuster captures this idea in his article titled: Who are the best teachers of Pasifika children? 'The



best teachers of Pasifika children are... the best teachers. It's empathy, not just ethnicity, that's important' (Schuster, 2008, p. 12).

The concept of 'va' – relationship or 'the space that relates' (Airini, Anae, et al, 2010) is at the heart of many Pacific nation cultures and their value-systems. Pacific students in this thesis research clearly appreciate teachers who 'teu le va' - respect and nurture relationships. This study did not explore the extent to which participants' perspectives about relationships are influenced by their ethnic cultural identities, values and beliefs. This would be an interesting area for future research.

### 5.3 Explain until I understand

*A teacher who makes sure that students have a good understanding of what they're learning in class.*

The second idea that dominated the Pacific student voice in this study was the importance of teachers clearly explaining learning concepts, tasks and expectations. Several comments referred to the importance of teachers persisting with their explanations until students understood what they were saying:

*Teachers who like, they teach you on, like, a specific subject and they won't move on until you like learn it.*

*They actually listen to me and help me understand something I'm confused about, they actually slow down and talk me through it.*

*They love teaching people that get it and understand it, and then when you want them to explain to you, like, aw I'm coming, but they never come.*

*They clearly state and make sure that we understand and/or comprehend what we are learning. They also clarify (what) we need to do to understand what we're learning.*

These sentiments reflect the advice for teachers that the Pasifex students from McAuley College have documented on their website. The need for students to have clarity about their learning dominates the 'Teaching practices that support Excellence Thinking' document:

- *Explaining concepts using clear examples that are easy to follow and understand.*
- *Not giving up when we don't understand immediately, but trying to find alternative ways of helping us understand.*
- *Being easy to approach for questions, feedback, and/or advice as needed.*

(Pasifex, n.d.)

Pacific students in Ostler-Malaulau's (2009) study offered suggestions about how teachers of year 9 and 10 students could improve their teaching. They talked about teachers providing easier ways to help students understand if they didn't have very good vocabulary. Similarly Hill and Hawk (2000) described effective teachers of Māori and Pacific students who knew when it was important to take time and show patience with students as they developed understanding of what they were learning. They said that students wanted teachers who persisted and did not give up on them.

One Year 10 female student in this thesis study talked about the importance of teachers presenting new learning in small chunks:

*I think it kind of needs to be a step by step process. Like, do one thing and focus on that and then when everybody's ready then move on, instead of getting right into it and giving you a whole bunch of information at one time and expecting you to be all good with it (July 2014).*

This reflects Hawk and Hill's description of effective teachers who use explicit teaching comprising presentation of material in small steps, 'pausing to check for student understanding' (2000, p. 36).

Indeed there are many similarities between the student voices of Hawk and Hill's 2000 research and those of this thesis study captured about 15 years later. For example:

“Some teachers make you feel stink when you say you don’t know how to do it. They say ‘you should have listened’ or ‘you wouldn’t have to ask if you had been concentrating’. Then we won’t ask again and we won’t know what to do”. (Hill & Hawk, 2000, p. 23)

*And they expect you to understand something you don’t understand, and then they’ll get angry and say you’re not listening when you were trying to but you didn’t understand it.*

Year 9 female student (2014)

Amituanai-Tolosa, McNaughton et al (2009) also found that Pacific student perspectives about effective teaching reflected the importance of clearer instruction. Students identified that teachers who enabled them to be more successful learners took time to clearly explain new conceptual ideas and broke these down for understanding.

The following comment from a year 10 male student reflects the findings of Ostler-Malaulau (2009) and Alison Jones’ research (1991) which found that Pacific students are more engaged and successful when their teachers are proactive and approach and interact with them rather than waiting for students to ‘ask when they don’t know’ (Jones, 1991, p.118):

*A teacher that takes time 1 on 1, interacting 1 on 1, like, that is around the class helping students, and doesn’t just sit on a laptop (September 2014).*

From what the students in this 2014 research are saying, it is likely that there are still teachers of year nine and ten classes who are using pedagogical strategies and forms of classroom organisation that reflect more of the ‘sage on the stage’ style of teaching rather than the ‘guide on the side’. There are possibly still too many teachers using a ‘one size fits all’ model with limited differentiation of learning material. As the following comments from students in this study suggest:

*Lessons when the teacher just writes stuff on the board and you just copy it, without really explaining what it is.*

*And you get some lessons when there's a certain person in your class or a certain group that are especially good at that and so, like you're not learning from it, but because they are always getting the questions right or they're always answering.*

*Yeah, they kind of forget that people have different levels of um, of ability when it comes to different subjects such as English and then you've got maths and stuff like that. Just because you're smart doesn't necessarily mean you know everything about every single subject and so you're kind of confused sometimes.*

*And then if you wanna like ask for help then the teachers might look down to you and your abilities and stuff, and they might try and, like, make you feel dum or something.*

Otunuku (2010) similarly found that Tongan secondary school students appreciated teachers who roved around the room and helped students individually when they needed it.

Chapter 7 will explore how well the systems and processes, which are in place to support high quality teaching and the development of teacher efficacy, address pedagogy related to all students having clarity about their learning.

#### **5.4 Not long periods of teacher-talk, note-taking, reading**

*They just talk and talk and talk and talk.*

When asked about styles of teaching that were ineffective, students in all three schools spoke about lessons that contained sustained sessions of lecture-style teaching, copious notes-taking from the board or power point and long periods of silent reading. Simply using some digital technology as a tool for teaching is not sufficient as it seems that copying from the chalkboard has simply been replaced by 'death by power point' for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners:

*They'd probably have a whole power point and make you write it all down*

This concept reflects a whole class teaching approach with limited student interaction. This pedagogical style, typical of teaching of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, appears not to suit most Pacific students who favour a more differentiated and interactive approach in which clarity of learning is emphasised.

*It's so boring when the teacher just stands there speaking all this stuff you don't understand, and then you're just like, yip, no, and you don't know what they're saying. And then they just keep going and you wait for them to stop but they just don't.*

The Tongan students in Otunuku's study similarly described teachers who used boring pedagogical methods. Negative teachers' influences included teachers who talked a lot and who required students to copy large amounts of information from the board, while they sat at their desk. Students distinguished between 'teachers who lectured a lot and those that fostered student-centred learning' (2010, p. 172).

In contrast the Pacific students in Jones' 1991 research interpreted 'doing school work' as recording the teacher's "good notes" (p.75). They believed their entire learning consisted of receiving and memorising the relevant knowledge from the teacher in the form of 'good notes'. The Pākehā students in the same study believed the teacher's role was to ensure the students understood what they were learning. It is interesting to note that the Pacific students in this 2014 research have comparably higher expectations for effective teaching compared to those in Jones' study. They expect teachers to implement a more interactive, explanatory and interesting pedagogical approach. This suggests that students in 2014 have experienced teachers who support them to be actively engaged in their learning, whether at primary school or in the early years of college. They recognise that these teachers help them to learn, in contrast to those who utilise lecture-style, passive learning methods.

Hill and Hawk (2000) describe effective teachers of Māori and Pacific students as those who accommodate different learning styles, provide variety, make learning fun and encourage dialogue.

This 2014 research has highlighted that despite a shift in expectations for effective teaching, as promoted by research, The New Zealand Curriculum, the New Zealand Teachers' Council and pre-service and in-service training organisations, there are still teachers in front of year 9 and 10 students who use out-dated teaching methods and *just talk and talk and talk and talk*.

## 5.5 Active and practical activities

*Actual interacting. Doing it myself. Practical.*

A similar finding to the importance of variety within lessons is the concept of active, practical, hands-on learning which was also referred to frequently by participants as a requirement for effective teaching and learning. As a Year 10 male participant articulated:

*Cos, I think for Pacific Islanders we like to see things being done. We can't just take notes down and know how it's done straight away. We have to do it ourselves (July, 2014).*

When student participants spoke about active learning, sometimes they referred to lessons where they were physically active, at other times they spoke about hands-on and creative activities or learning which involved interactions with others:

*Group work, so you can gather all your ideas and thoughts, and, um, yeah, make, make something together. Also using technology, which is quite fun and creative to do.*

*Participating in sports and communicating more actively in activities.*

*I like mixing chemicals and experiencing stuff.*

*I like moving around and doing a lot of sports.*

*I'm an active person.*

When asked what advice they would give to a new teacher starting at their school their responses often included suggestions about interactive and practical activities:

*Play fun games that involves the subject.*

*Make some activities enjoyable and practical.*

*Play games, activities.*

*A lot of interactive activities.*

Two Year 9 boys, although economical with their words, summed up enjoyable, engaging learning as:

*Experiments.*

*Experience.*

The single words of these students reflect the experiential learning approach promoted by Dewey over a century ago. Many of the participant responses echo teaching methods advocated by Dewey which prioritised 'doing' and social interaction as part of the learning process: "the individual who is to be educated is a social individual" (Dewey, 1897, para. 7).

In more recent times Blaydes Madigan (2009) and others have used neuroscience research to support their arguments for more kinaesthetic learning. Research shows that regular physical activity helps teenagers perform better academically (Blaydes Madigan, 2009; Lengel & Kuczald, 2010).

There is some New Zealand-based research that shows students of Pacific heritage prefer and benefit from teaching that involves active and interactive learning, for instance Chen (2014), Hill & Hawk (1998), McDonald & Lipine (2011), Poskitt (in press), and Spiller (2012). The work of Carpenter et al (2000) demonstrates the importance of students being active participants in the learning process. They found that successful teachers of Māori and Pacific students ensure their learners take responsibility for, and are actively engaged in, their learning, rather than being passive recipients of knowledge. Hunter's work with senior primary students demonstrates that teachers can draw on the ethnic socialisation of their Māori and Pacific students and use the cultural values of communalism, collectivism and respect to develop interactive and inquiring mathematical learning communities which enhance their learning in mathematics (Hunter, 2007).

## 5.6 Fun

*They know how to have fun ... make learning fun.*

'Fun' was a word that came up repeatedly in the questionnaires and group interviews when students were voicing their perspectives about effective teaching. It is an elusive word, with many interpretations. Consequently participants were asked to explain what they meant by 'fun', both during the group interviews and at a subsequent meeting (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Definitions of 'fun'**

<b>FUN: Participants' definitions</b>
Activities
Less talking
Movies
Music
They make learning interesting.
Games
They don't make you just sit and listen.
Their attitude has to be fun: they are really happy, smile.
They listen.
Kind of both (Teachers are funny/lessons are fun). They're strict but they're not kind of.
They're like kicked back but they actually help you learn.

Many of these definitions overlap with categories previously covered in this chapter, such as those related to relationships and active learning.

Hill and Hawk (2000) found that effective teachers used, and allowed their Māori and Pacific students to use, humour in the classroom. When there was humour students found the environment to be more relaxed and were more engaged in their lessons. Humour, including teachers who were not afraid to laugh at themselves, encouraged students to enjoy classroom interactions and take risks with their learning. It is interesting to note that, when discussing what good teachers do to help students who are struggling, some students



in this thesis research replied: *They know how to have fun / joke around / crack jokes, play games* (July, 2014). This suggests that, like the students in Hawk and Hill's research, they are less likely to struggle with their learning when the teacher promotes a 'fun' classroom environment.

## 5.7 Interesting, not stuff I already know

*Cos it's just some stuff you already know.*

Student participants also spoke frequently about their preference for lessons that were interesting. Many of the responses referred to lessons that contained new learning, rather than lessons that bored them because they were repetitive:

*Learning new, interesting things.*

*It's fun learning new stuff.*

*They just repeat what they say.*

*When there is a lot of repeating the same task.*

*They don't talk about the same things over and over.*

*Cos its not, like, benefitting your learning, because you already know how to do it.*

When asked what advice they would give to a new teacher, responses included:

*Don't be boring.*

*Don't talk about the same subject over and over.*

*They would need to teach things that are relatively interesting.*

These comments suggest that Pacific students prefer personalised learning approaches. Teaching strategies and curriculum content that are responsive to their interests and learning needs are likely to better engage them in learning. To effectively implement personalised learning programmes teachers need to know their learners well. They need to know about their needs, capabilities, interests, and, as several of the sentiments above suggest, they need to know about their students' prior learning to ensure lesson content is

novel. With comprehensive knowledge about their learners, teachers can build the system around the learner. Bolstad, Gilbert et al (2012) describe this as personalised learning. However, they argue that this approach to teaching and learning is only being implemented, in New Zealand, in a limited way.

Students who participated in the research undertaken by Amituanai-Tolosa, McNaughton et al (2009) described teachers who facilitated boring lessons because they made limited use of students' own knowledge and didn't relate topics to things in which students were interested. Amituanai-Tolosa, McNaughton et al conclude that teachers need to listen to and value student voice as this will lead to increased student empowerment, motivation and consequently academic success.

Tongan students in Otunuku's (2010) focus group interviews spoke about becoming disengaged due to boring teaching methods and uninteresting curriculum content. Porter-Samuels (2013) argues that teachers who make learning relevant, authentic and specific to the context of their Pacific students are more effective. She states that teachers should work collaboratively with students' families to co-construct meaningful contexts for learning that will support the strengths, needs and aspirations of Pacific students and their families (2013, p. 22).

Hawk & Hill (2000) assert that effective teachers understand the worlds of their Māori and Pacific students. They refer to Gordon's teaching strategies necessary for ensuring that teachers are in touch with students. These include 'relate content to students' outside interests' and 'know your students' (Gordon, 1997, as cited in Hawk & Hill, 2000, p.18).

In 2012 the Education Review Office found that many schools were still not effectively implementing learning programmes which accelerated the progress of their Pacific students. The evaluation titled Improving Outcomes for Pacific Learners found a minority of schools had appropriate initiatives and strategies in place to enhance Pacific student success. Understanding the diverse interests and needs of Pacific learners underpinned the features of the effective schools. The report states that 'teachers need to be able to work with individual learners to develop meaningful curriculum and specific strategies' (ERO, 2012).

All fully registered teachers in New Zealand are expected to “respond effectively to the diverse language and cultural experiences, and the varied strengths, interests and needs” of their students (Criterion 9, New Zealand Registered Teachers Criteria, 2009). The research cited above, including this thesis study, suggests that there may still be many teachers who are not responding effectively to the interests and prior knowledge of Pacific students.

## 5.8 Strict (but fun)

### *Be strict*

This concept was not mentioned often in the focus group interviews or the questionnaires, however, it was the second most popular idea selected by participants in the post-it exercise with a frequency count of 12. Students thought it was important that teachers balance a strict disposition with the ability to make lessons fun.

*Be fun, but strict at the same time.*

*Kind of both, like they're strict but they're not, kind of.*

When asked, in the questionnaire, what gets in the way of their learning many students (16/23) talked about noisy classrooms or being distracted by other students. It is not surprising therefore that many of the participants appreciated having a teacher who could enforce firm behavioural boundaries and maintain an orderly learning environment.

Hawk & Hill (2000) found that effective teachers had classroom routines that were understood by students and implemented consistently. They set and enforced high standards for classroom tidiness, behaviour, language use, manners and work presentation. The Māori and Pacific students in their study regarded ‘strict’ as a positive trait: ‘Students expect, and respect, a teacher who is strict and does not let them get away with inappropriate behaviour’ (p. 49). In Hawk & Hill’s study students talked about ‘good and bad strict’. Some teachers were strict in ways that they found unacceptable, such as ‘yelling, putting us down, giving us the ‘evils’, not having fun or jokes’ (p. 50). Pacific students in Spiller’s (2012) study similarly disliked their teachers’ authoritarian actions and words which

made them feel like they were continually being punished and put down. When they felt disrespected by their teachers they ignored them and became disengaged.

### 5.9 Respects me, including my culture

*When they look at you, like you can't do that and then you start to think, Oh I can't do that... Yeah because they base you on your stereotype, like what they know of a stereotype Samoan... or Pacific Islander.*

(Two female Year 9 students)

The concept of 'Respect me, including my culture' was selected by eight of the twenty three students as being one of the top three important qualities for an effective teacher. The term 'respect' was not used often in the focus group interviews and questionnaires but several of the sentiments expressed by participants implied respect was an important attribute for a successful teacher.

A small number of students referred to teachers who they believed demonstrated racist attitudes and behaviours. The following comments were made during a focus group and describe a teacher's use of a seating plan:

Research assistant: *What's a not so great teacher to learn off?*

Student: *A teacher who is racist, a racist teacher.*

Student: *Yeah, they split the...*

*They put you on another, there's like white people on this side, white people on that side. (indicating with hands)*

*Yeah, they pick you out like the holocaust, they put the white people at the back. ... Sometimes they call you black.*

Several participant responses that were coded to alternate categories can also be interpreted as an appreciation of teachers who are respectful, such as:

*They don't embarrass someone, cos sometimes I put my hand up and I say something wrong and then everyone just laughs, but it's sad.*

*Teachers that treat their students equally.*

*A teacher who accepts students for what they are, who just, yeah what you can do and what you can't do.*

*They accept you for who you are if you're different.*

*Like they understand that if you're behind, they don't judge you for it.*

*And then if you wanna like ask for help then the teachers might look down to you and your abilities and stuff, and they might try and, like, make you feel dumb or something.*

These remarks reflect the findings of Spiller's research (2012). She found that teachers engage their Pacific students more effectively when they allow them dignity in their learning and treat every student as an individual. Students in her study valued teachers who listened to them attentively and respected them as a person as well as respecting their ideas and questions.

Students did not discuss their Pacific cultural heritages often during the questionnaires or focus group interviews; however, having teachers who respected their culture was clearly important to a significant number of students as is shown in the post-it exercise. This suggests that for these students their cultural identities are important to them.

If students feel their ethnic culture is valued and respected by others their cultural identities and pride are likely to be enhanced. The research of McDonald & Lipine (2011) and Mila-Schaaf & Robinson (2010) demonstrates that maintenance of Pacific pride and cultural identity was significantly associated with school engagement and achievement. McDonald & Lipine explored the challenges that a group of Samoan students in New Zealand schools faced as they moved between the world of the dominant Papālagi culture and the ethnic cultures of their families. However, they assert that the strong cultural identities of these students contributed to their capacity to deal with the inconsistencies in their worlds and "they were able to weave a successful path to ensure academic success" (2011, p. 159).

### 5.10 Talk one to one

*They come up to you.*

*And sit down with you.*

*One on one.*

Several responses offered by students indicated that they valued teachers taking the time to talk to them on a one to one basis about their learning. This finding reflects the work of Hattie and others who promote the importance of teacher interaction and feedback to individual students about their learning (Absolom, 2006; Hattie, 2012; Timperley, 2013). This is reflected in the following comment from a participant:

*A teacher that takes time. One on one, interacting one on one, like, that is around the class helping students, and doesn't just sit on a laptop.*

(Year 10 male, July 2014)

There is little research that explicitly refers to teachers engaging with Pacific students on a one to one basis to support their learning, however, several of the teacher behaviours referred to above are closely aligned to this concept. For example teachers who genuinely explain learning concepts, instructions and assessment criteria until each student understands (5.3) would often be having individualised conversations with their students. Teachers that have caring, connected relationships with students (5.2) are likely to have discussions with individuals. This will happen as they get to know their students and build positive relationships. Students are more likely to feel confident to engage with their teachers in conversations about their learning if the teacher : student relationship is one of trust, respect and care.

In their document 'Teaching for Excellence', students from the McCauley High School Pasifex group advise teachers to be easy to approach 'for questions, feedback, and/or advice as needed, including being available outside of class time if possible' (Pasifex, n.d.).

### 5.11 Encourages me

*He pushes me, encourages me. Believes that I'm better than what I think.*

A number of participants said that teachers who were encouraging helped them to learn. This concept had an overall frequency count of eight. Sometimes this was communicated as *pushing me to the max* and at other times participants spoke about teachers who conveyed high expectations for their performance. On the other hand, teachers who communicated low expectations of their abilities were seen as having a negative impact on student success.

*Yes, a teacher that just told us just to go into (lower ability stream), when we wanted to go into (higher ability stream), our aim was to go into (higher), but she was like, nah, just go into (lower).* (Year 10 female)

*When they underestimate your abilities and they start giving you really easy work, and they don't take you seriously when you ask for harder work.* (Year 9 female)

One of the participants could think of no teachers in her education to date who had encouraged her. In the questionnaire she wrote:

*I don't have any teachers in my mind that really helped me learn they just showed me how to do the work but there was no encouragement involved.*

The Pacific students in Spiller's study spoke about teachers who "think we are dumb" (2012a, p. 36). They articulated that they felt insulted when given simple and trivial tasks such as 'word finds'. In the Pacific schooling improvement research by Amituanai-Toloa, McNaughton et al (2009) students identified that teachers who believed in them and their ability enabled them to be more successful.

Much has been written about the ways in which teachers' deficit thinking can restrict the academic engagement and achievement of Māori and Pacific students (Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Bishop, Berryman, et al, 2009; Otunuku, 2010; Spiller 2012; Porter-Samuels, 2013). Likewise international research, such as the work of Scheurich (1998) and Ladson-Billings

(1994) (both cited in Carpenter, McMurchy-Pilkington et al, 2000), demonstrates that teachers who make a positive impact on the learning of students from ethnic minority groups convey high expectations and encourage their pupils to succeed.

‘Teachers who believe the best of students’ was identified by Pacific students in Ostler-Malaulau’s research as important for learning in the first years at college: ‘rather than “...some of them will probably look down on you, just cos how you are”’ (2009, p. 72). These students felt that secondary schools should encourage students and build their confidence so that they can relate to others, ask for help and be motivated to set goals.

Carpenter et al (2000) explored the qualities of teachers who successfully promoted the engagement and achievement of their Pacific learners. A key finding of their research was that effective teachers had only high expectations for their students’ success, both at school and beyond. Their study includes the following words from one of the high-performing teachers: ‘You never give up... if you set the right conditions for them they will learn’ (2000, p. 5).

### **5.12 Missing from the Top Ten: Cultural Responsiveness**

Arguably many of the teaching qualities and behaviours highlighted above could be described as culturally responsive. For example relationships (5.2) reflect the Pacific concept of the ‘va’ and pan-Pacific values of love and respect. Teachers who show students that they respect and value their ethnic culture (5.9) are being culturally responsive. However, seldom did students in this thesis research talk explicitly about a culturally responsive curriculum or their cultural identities, unless prompted to do so. That is, there was little reference to lesson content, materials and concepts that reflected and were based in their own Pacific cultures. This is significant because much is written about the importance of culturally responsive curricula to enhance Pacific student achievement. However, to date, there is little empirical research to demonstrate this.

When prompted, students said the following about curricula that acknowledged and reflected their Pacific heritage:



**School A:** (where some students could take Samoan as an option subject)

Research Assistant: *Why do you like Samoan?*

Student: *Because we know more things about our culture.*

Student: *It's who we are. It's our culture.*

Student: *They teach us things we didn't know about our culture.*

Student: *History.*

**School B**

Research Assistant: *Do you like it when the lessons are relating to something you like...*

*(Nodding of heads)*

Student: *When we got to write about our family, and like our backgrounds and stuff.*

Researcher: *And that included culture?*

Student: *Like how they talked about our cultures and stuff and like our backgrounds.*

Student: *In Social Studies in Year 9 you do a Pasefika assignment. And it was kind of cool because you got to learn new things about, like, your culture and also about others.*

These two examples from the focus group interviews were the only times that students talked about culturally responsive curricula. There was no mention in the questionnaire responses.

Did students not talk about a culturally responsive curriculum because it did not feature strongly in their experiences at school? As Spiller (2013) writes: 'Pasifika students know only what they experience in front of them e.g., the pedagogies of their teachers. They have no other comparison. Therefore they can only relate their feeling by saying the work is "boring"' (2013, p. 63). The following excerpt from one of the focus group interviews would

suggest the students in this thesis research had little or no experience of culturally responsive learning contexts:

Researcher (late in the group interview): *And what about teachers who make sure that some of the lessons have something to do with Pacific cultures?*

Student: *We don't have that here. That never happens.* (Others shake their heads)

Student: *Nah.*

Researcher: *What about in English? Do you ever get to read books that have anything to do with your culture?*

Student: *Nah.* (general shaking of heads)

Research Assistant: *Not even in Social Studies?*

Student: *Nah, aw – sometimes.*

Or perhaps differentiation between learning contexts that reflected Māori, Papālagi, Pacific nations, or other ethnic cultures was not explicit or significant to these students. Several of the students identified with more than one ethnic culture. However, the examples given above would suggest that the participants do think about their ethnic culture/s as different to others and important to them.

Previous student voice studies have similarly found that Pacific students do not mention culturally responsive curricula amongst the most significant features of effective teaching and learning (Amituanai-Toloa, McNaughton et al, 2009; Hill & Hawk, 1998; Ostler-Malaulau, 2009; Spiller, 2013).

Porter-Samuels' (2013) review of relevant literature indicates that there is little empirical data to show the relationship between cultural responsiveness and the achievement of Pacific students in New Zealand. Otunuku is critical of government policy and initiatives which are focussed on culturally responsive approaches aimed at reaffirming Pacific students' cultural identities but still fail them academically (2010, p. 224).

Although it is logical to assume that learning which includes authentic contexts, strategies and concepts related to students' family backgrounds and cultures will engage students and enhance their achievement, there is limited research evidence to substantiate this assumption in relation to Pacific students in New Zealand secondary schools. Hunter's research (2007, 2011) demonstrates that when teachers of primary school Pacific learners develop genuine, culturally responsive mathematics learning communities, in which both students and their teachers develop inquiry skills, academic progress is accelerated. Recent Education Review Office (ERO) national evaluation reports on Pacific success encourage schools to develop curriculum and teaching practices that include Pacific contexts and perspectives (2010, 2012, 2013). The 2013 ERO evaluation indicates that there is a relationship between schools that provide professional development for teachers to support them to engage culturally with their Pacific learners and improved achievement levels. However, it is unclear whether the teachers in the high achieving schools were actually delivering culturally responsive learning programmes (ERO, 2013).

There is still more research needed to determine the impact of culturally responsive curricula on Pacific student achievement (Amituanai-Toloa, McNaughton et al, 2009; Chu, Glasgow et al, 2013; Porter-Samuels, 2013). Chu, Glasgow et al (2013) highlight the need for access to improved data about Pacific student outcomes. They argue that the standard of research evidence needs to be 'raised from the current over-reliance on experiential knowledge and anecdote rather than data on student outcomes. This challenge is arguably increased when dealing with year 9 and 10 student performance, as nationally collected achievement information is not available for these cohorts who fall between the National Standards achievement results and the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

If culturally responsive curriculum programmes are not high priorities according to students' perspectives about factors which enhance teaching and learning, is it timely for policy-makers, school leaders and teachers to focus their attention, energies, resources, and evaluation on other areas likely to promote Pacific achievement? Pacific student voices tell us that the most significant of these factors relate to positive teacher: student relationships

and clear explanations of learning. Chapter Seven will explore the implications of these findings for teachers, schools and the wider education system.

## Chapter Six

### Implications and conclusion

#### 6.1 What students of Pacific heritage say is effective teaching and learning for them

The aim of this thesis research was to find out what students of Pacific heritage say is effective teaching and learning for them. Three groups of Year 9 and 10 students from three schools in a North Island city, representing a range of Pacific nations, socio-economic areas and genders took part in focus group interviews and questionnaires. Their perspectives about effective teaching and learning are reported in Chapter Five and further discussed in Chapter Six. This chapter explores the possible implications for teachers, schools and the wider education system and reminds all stakeholders to truly listen, both to the findings of previous research about Pacific learning, but most importantly to the voices of those at 'le fatu o le fa'amoemoe' ('the heart of the matter'). As the students who successfully campaigned for increased student voice in Boston schools have said: "We are the ones in the classroom: ask us!" (Boston Student Advisory Council, 2012). The implications of this thesis research highlight a number of questions for reflection, discussion and possible future research. These are included in this chapter.

The findings of this research suggest that students of Pacific heritage believe the most important factors for effective teaching and their successful learning are:

1. Teachers who build and maintain positive, caring relationships with their students. They treat their pupils with respect, encourage them and convey high expectations for their performance.
2. Teachers who clearly explain learning concepts, instructions, assessment criteria and all aspects of learning. They ensure all students understand their learning.
3. Lessons that are varied and involve practical, active and interactive learning. Learning content that reflects students' interests and is novel, rather than repetitive.

## 6.2 Implications

### Relationships

The students in this study echo the voices of Pacific and Māori students who have been the subjects of much New Zealand-based research about effective teaching (Amituanai-Toloa et al, 2009; Hill & Hawk, 2000; Ostler-Malaulau, 2009; Otunuku, 2010; Poskitt, in press; Spiller, 2012). Those at the 'heart of the matter' repeatedly tell us that positive, caring connections with those who teach them are essential for their active engagement in learning and their consequent educational success. Alton-Lee's report (2014) about the effectiveness of *Te Kotahitanga* suggests that this programme, which has a central focus on teacher: student relationships, has had a positive impact on the engagement and achievement of Māori students. Although New Zealand research such as Amituanai-Toloa et al (2009), Hill & Hawk (2000) and McGee et al (2003) has focused on the importance of teacher-student relationships, other than *Te Kotahitanga* there is little research which explores what teachers, school leaders and the education system as a whole are doing to actively support teachers to strengthen their relationships with individual students.

If relationships are so important for enhancing educational success for Pacific students then perhaps they might also be a central focus of processes which provide support for teachers' professional learning, evaluate teacher quality and communicate expectations for effective teaching. Such processes and frameworks include programmes for professional learning and development (PLD), teacher appraisal processes, the Registered Teacher Criteria, and the Education Review Office (ERO) Evaluation Indicators. To what extent do these processes and frameworks focus on caring, empathetic connections between teachers and learners?

The findings of this thesis research suggest that it may be timely for schools, educational leaders, policy makers, pre-service training providers, and PLD providers and funders to examine how well teachers are provided with appropriate support to establish and maintain effective, caring and respectful connections with their students, and in particular their Pacific students. Some teachers have certain personality traits and dispositions which mean they find it easier than others to develop positive relationships with learners. However, the voices of the students in this study may be a provocation to all involved in teacher

recruitment, pre-service training and in-service support to sharpen the focus on the essential area of relationships.

Fourteen years ago Hawk, Cowley et al (2001) argued that positive, respectful teacher-student relationships were the critical factor to raise the achievement of Māori and Pacific students. They posed the following questions (p.16):

**Figure 7: Effective teacher-student relationships.**

Can teachers learn to develop an effective relationship?

What can pre-service educators do to prepare teachers?

How can schools/universities ensure their teachers have such a relationship?

How can we give students safe ways to give feedback on their teachers' performance?

What can/should schools/universities do if a teacher cannot develop such a relationship?

What type of professional development will assist teachers most?

These questions are still highly relevant and might be explored in future research. It may also be useful to explore the extent to which they have been addressed by the education community in the fourteen years since the findings of Hawk, Cowley and colleagues.

According to Hill and Hawk, the keys to effecting improved practice and performance for individual teachers are accurate identification of development needs, targeted professional development programmes and teacher self-efficacy. They argue that students are the best informants about teacher effectiveness and development needs (Hill & Hawk, 2000). Poskitt (in press) affirms the potential of consulting adolescent students to reinvigorate teaching and learning as they are perceptive about the teacher qualities, interactions and learning processes that are likely to enhance their learning. As Spiller says "Most of all, for good Pasifika learning to occur, teachers and schools need to really listen to their students" (2012, p. 65).

There is little evidence that teachers and leaders in New Zealand secondary schools use student feedback in consistent and rigorous ways as part of performance management processes. The data gathered for ERO's 2014 National Evaluation Report about teacher appraisal show that only a small percentage of secondary schools required teachers to gather student voice in a systematic and rigorous way as an aspect of their teacher appraisal processes. Within schools, teachers varied in their use of student voice (ERO, 2014). In North America, the Boston Student Advisory Council has successfully campaigned to include student voice in teacher evaluation processes. There is an expectation and acceptance that students are best placed to evaluate teacher effectiveness (Chu, 2013).

The findings of this thesis research reflect wider research findings that learning for Pacific students is enhanced when teachers develop positive, caring connections with them such as Hill & Hawk, 2000; Ostler-Malaulau, 2009; Otunuku, 2010; and Spiller, 2012. It is likely that students are the best people to evaluate how well their teachers foster such relationships. Consequently it is important that secondary schools attended by Pacific students have robust appraisal systems that make effective use of student feedback. Using student voice in a consistent and rigorous way may help teachers develop positive, empathetic relationships to better engage their students in learning. Examination of the benefits of the *Te Kotahitanga* teacher evaluation approach is likely to assist teachers, school leaders and others in the education sector to design useful and effective teacher appraisal models which support more teachers to establish and sustain caring and connected relationships with their Pacific students.

Frameworks which highlight and communicate expectations for teachers to foster positive relationships exist within the New Zealand schooling system. These include the 'Effective Pedagogy' section of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007), Criterion 1, Registered Teachers Criteria (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2009), *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners* (Ministry of Education, 2011), the 'Effective Teaching Profile' in *Te Kotahitanga* (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) and the *ERO Evaluation Indicators for School Reviews* (ERO, 2011). More research is needed on the extent to which teachers, school leaders, pre-service trainers and professional development providers are



using these tools to develop teachers' capacity to build and maintain positive relationships with learners.

### Explain until I understand

System-wide guidelines and expectations are less explicit about the importance of teachers providing clear and effective explanations of learning for students. The 'Effective Pedagogy' section of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) outlines seven 'Teacher actions promoting learning'. The list does not explicitly refer to teachers' use of effective explanations. The action titled 'Enhance the relevance of new learning' does include a reference to students understanding what they are learning, but this is a general reference rather than a specific, high-priority strategy. Similarly the Registered Teachers Criteria and associated key indicators do not explicitly mention anything related to teachers' explanatory strategies.

*Explaining until (students) understand* is a basic and fundamental requirement of teaching. Is it an element of teaching that is taken for granted by those who define guidelines for best practice? The comments from Pacific students in this and other student voice research suggest that there are still significant numbers of teachers who have difficulty ensuring that all their pupils experience clarity of learning. In a 2012 national evaluation project, ERO found that many teachers and leaders would benefit from a better understanding of how to include their Year 9 and 10 students in their learning (ERO, 2012).

In order to improve educational outcomes for Pacific students, this thesis research recommends that:

- those involved in planning initial teacher education programmes consider raising the awareness of the importance of explanation for new teachers
- support be available for teachers who need to increase their capacity to provide clear learning explanations. Increased use of 'Assessment for Learning' strategies, such as use of clear success criteria and exemplars, may be one way that teachers can improve their explanatory teaching
- a focus on how well teachers explain learning concepts is an explicit component of teacher evaluation for teachers of Pacific students,

- student feedback contributes to the appraisal process which evaluates the effectiveness of teachers' abilities to provide clear explanations.

As students approach NCEA assessments, it is important that teachers are skilled in clarifying learning and, in particular, assessment criteria. The language of the criteria describing achievement, merit and excellence requirements for NCEA standard assessments is often not written in easily understood language. For example:

'Produce a systematic body of work informed by established practice, which develops and clarifies ideas, using a range of media with fluency' - AS90916 (Visual Arts) criteria for Excellence.

(New Zealand Qualifications Authority, 2010)

Ongoing positive interactions with individual learners will provide strong foundations for teachers to listen to their students and answer their questions as they strive to understand new learning.

#### Interesting, interactive and new learning

Pacific students tell us that varied, interesting and interactive lessons help them engage in their learning. School appraisal systems and programmes for professional development are two vehicles for improving the extent to which teachers use techniques which engage learners. Teachers need to continually explore teaching approaches that actively engage students in their learning. Student-centred approaches that have proven successful with a range of students include personalised learning (Bolstad, Gilbert et al, 2012), flipped learning (Yarbo, Arfstrom et al, 2014), use of digital technologies (Bolstad, Gilbert et al, 2012; Wright, 2010), assessment for learning (Assessment Reform Group, 1999) and active engagement in learning (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010).

Students in this thesis research said they found it boring when teachers repeated learning material. These findings reflect the work of others who have focused on adolescent engagement in learning such as Cox & Kennedy (2008), Poskitt (2011, in press) and Wylie (2006). Effective teachers minimise repetition by ensuring formative assessment informs

differentiated, targeted and sequential learning programmes. As part of future-oriented learning approaches, schools might explore strategies whereby teachers and students work together to, not only determine learning goals and next steps, but also to design the learning experiences and methods. It is likely that when students are given increased responsibility for their learning, their voices will inform the 'how' as well as the 'what' of learning. If teachers of Pacific students use more student feedback to design the way lessons are delivered, then learners are less likely to be disengaged with long periods of note-taking and teachers who *talk and talk and talk* (Year 10 male student, September, 2014).

### 6.3 Areas for further exploration

For teachers of Māori students, there are some national guiding documents and resources which outline strategies to enhance teaching and learning such as *Ka Hikitia: Accelerating Success* (Ministry of Education, 2013), *Tātaiako: Cultural Competencies for teachers of Māori learners* (Ministry of Education, 2011) and the *Effective Teaching Profile* (Bishop & Berryman, 2009). There is a lack of similar support for teachers of Pacific students. *The Pacific Education Plan 2013-2017* (Ministry of Education, 2012) is a strategic document which highlights goals and strategies for various organisations and stakeholders, however, it includes little advice and guidance for teachers at a classroom level. It is timely for the findings of key research publications to be synthesised and formalised so that teachers can clearly and deliberately trial and evaluate strategies for effectively teaching Pacific students. Further research and evaluation are needed to demonstrate how well effective teaching strategies, identified by research, impact on the educational success of Pacific students (Chu, Glasgow et al, 2013). More research is also needed to further explore the questions posed by Hawk, Cowley et al (2001) over a decade ago (Refer Fig. 7).

The findings and implications of this thesis study suggest the following areas for further research:

- to explore further what is effective teaching and learning for Pacific learners
- to investigate what teachers and school leaders are doing to strengthen relationships between teachers and their Pacific students

- to research more consistent and systematic ways of using student voice by teachers and school leaders. How teachers listen and respond to those at 'le fatu o le fa'amomoe'<sup>7</sup> so they can adapt their teaching and increase the engagement and success of their learners
- to explore potential adaptation of The Boston Youth on Board (YOB) initiative: in New Zealand to strengthen ways in which student voice can contribute to positive educational outcomes for students from indigenous and minority ethnic groups
- to research alongside teachers of Pacific students effective ways of *explain[ing] until (students) understand* and adapting teaching strategies when necessary to ensure their students' clarity and active engagement in learning
- to investigate ways school leaders build teachers' capacity to *explain until (students) understand* within performance management and professional development systems
- to ascertain how well students attempting NCEA standards understand the assessment criteria for achieved, merit and excellence
- to investigate any significant work to address the questions posed by Hawk, Cowley et al (2002)
- to explore the impact guidelines and frameworks, which set expectations for teaching practice, have on the factors that Pacific students say are important for their learning, and
- to examine the value of Pacific learners and their teachers having a framework or resource such as the *Effective Teacher Profile* (Bishop & Berryman, 2009) or *Tātaiako* (Ministry of Education, 2011) to provide teachers with indicators and suggestions for evidence-based best practice to support Pacific success.

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<sup>7</sup> Translation: 'the heart of the matter'. (Samoan)

#### 6.4 Conclusion

This study has privileged the voices of Pacific learners. As Hawk and Cowley et al (2001) and Spiller (2013) have recommended, Pacific student voice, gathered in a safe, robust and reliable way, could be a key component of school systems to evaluate and develop teaching practice.

Pacific students in this thesis research commented on a range of factors they believed helped them to learn. Most of these factors related to teachers and their pedagogical strategies. Students spoke and wrote most frequently about teachers' use of clear and persistent explanations, interesting lessons, active learning and, above all, caring and connected relationships.

Fifteen years of New Zealand research about effective teaching for students of Pacific heritage consistently demonstrates that positive teacher-student relationships are of the utmost importance to enhance the engagement and achievement of Pacific learners (Hawk, Cowley et al, 2002; Ostler-Malaulau, 2009; Otunuku, 2010; Pasikale, 1998; Spiller, 2012). New Zealand educators and policy makers have been striving for two decades, through successive Pacific Education Plans, to close the achievement gap between Pacific learners and their peers. While there have been small improvements in NCEA results for Pacific cohorts in recent years, there remains a "long brown tail of underachievement" (Aumua, 2014, para 1) with Māori and Pacific youth overrepresented among the 10,000 students who leave school each year with no formal qualifications. This thesis research demonstrates that the perspectives of current junior secondary school Pacific learners converge with the findings of fifteen years of research which reveal that caring and respectful pedagogical relationships are the crucial factor for Pacific student' engagement and success.

Kaupapa Māori research has led to the creation of teaching approaches that have enhanced educational success for Māori learners (Alton-Lee, 2014). Theories and practices related to *Te Kotahitanga* and the *Effective Teacher Profile* are based in Māori world views and prioritise positive relationships and respect. The pan-Pacific concept of the 'va' is of great significance for Pacific peoples in all their relationships. With increased understanding of the importance of the 'va' and a deliberate focus on how to 'teu le va' in their interactions with

Pacific learners, teachers are more likely to engage Pacific youth in their learning. Pacific values of love, respect and the 'va' underpin effective teaching strategies for Pacific success. The words of a Year 10 male participant in this thesis research sum up the significance of teacher-student relationships:

*If I don't get along with the teacher then I don't have a good lesson.*

(September, 2014)

The words may be simple, but have we heard them?

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: The Questionnaire

O matou 'o le fatu 'o le fa'amoemoe - fesili mai!  
*We are the heart of the matter- ask us!*

#### Questionnaire

*Thank you for giving up some of your time to help with this research project. Please take a few moments to answer the following questions about your learning.*

1. What are your favourite subjects at school?
2. Why do you like them?
3. Think of a teacher who was good for you and helped you learn. What did they do that helped you to learn?
4. If a new teacher started at your school next term what advice would you give them to make their lessons enjoyable and interesting, and help students like yourself learn?
5. What gets in the way of your learning? What stops you from learning?
6. What questions or issues do you think we should talk about when we meet to discuss: what helps you to learn and what makes a good teacher?



## Appendix B:

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR THOSE GIVING CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT

O matou 'o le fatu 'o le fa'amoemoe - fesili mai!  
*We are the heart of the matter- ask us!*

My name is Lynda Knight-de Blois and I am a student at Massey University. I am doing a research project for my Master of Education degree. I want to find out what students of Pacific heritage describe as good teaching and learning. My research question is: *What do Pacific students say is effective teaching and learning for them?*

The Ministry of Education's Pasifika Education Plan (2013-2017) has a focus on helping teachers to find the best ways to improve achievement for Pacific students. My main reason for choosing this research topic is that I believe that students' perspectives should inform the work of educational agencies, leaders and teachers. I hope that this small study can contribute to further work in this area.

#### **Project Description and Invitation:**

The main part of this project will involve talking to small groups of Year 9 and 10 students who have Pacific Island heritage. Students will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire. They will be asked about the types of teaching that they believe helps them to learn.

I am inviting you to participate in this research, but I do need your consent to be involved.

#### **Participant Identification and Recruitment:**

I am working with three schools in the Wellington region with the support of their principals. I have asked the school to assist me to use a strategy to randomly select participants to be part of the focus groups. There will be around 8 students in each group.

#### **Project Procedures:**

If you agree to take part in this project this is what will be involved:

- 1) The first meeting will be very short and will be held at your school for all the students involved in the project. You will be told where and when to meet. It is likely to be at a morning break time. You will meet me and my student research assistants. These are four Pacific students in Year 12 -13 from two Wellington schools. These students are assisting me with the meetings. We will explain the project to you and give you a consent form to take home.

- 2) A second meeting will be held at school. This will take about 15 - 20 minutes and is likely to take place during a break time. We will ask you to fill out a short questionnaire (about 5 questions).
- 3) The third meeting will take about 45 minutes. We will provide lunch for this session. Please advise us if you have any food allergies. After eating we will have a *focus group interview*. This just means we will chat with you to find out about what you think is good teaching and helps you to learn. I hope that the conversation will help you to share your experiences in your own words. The focus group will be recorded on an iPad mini (video and audio) and we will make some notes to assist us to remember what was said. You can choose not to be videoed if you wish. No true names will be recorded and we will ask you not to use the names of others when you share your ideas and experiences.
- 4) The last meeting will be a feedback session when we report back to you, what we thought you said – the general ideas and opinions, not those of any individuals. This is a chance for us to check that we have “got it right”, that we understand what you have said and have summarised your views correctly. This session should take around 20 minutes.

**Use of information shared:**

Information collected will be confidential – the names of students will not be recorded in reports or publications. I am interested in group trends – no individual students or teacher will be evaluated or identified in any reported research information. If you consent to being videoed these digital image recordings will be stored securely and confidentially and destroyed/deleted once analysis of the information has been completed. No one other than the researcher and the researcher’s supervisor will have access to these recordings.

It is estimated that a summary of the research project findings will be completed by early 2015 and will be sent to you at your school should you be interested to read it. Alternatively you can contact me to request one.

**Your rights as a participant:**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- ask for the iPad recording to be turned off at any time during the group interview;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

**Project Contacts:**

Researcher: Lynda Knight-de Blois  
Phone: 027 603 0580, 027 522 7607  
[lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com](mailto:lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com)  
Supervisor: Dr Jenny Poskitt  
06 3569 099 ext 83070  
[J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz)

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 14/17. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).*

### **Appendix C: Samoan translation of informed consent form**

O lo'u igoa o Lynda Knight de-Blois ma o a'u o se tama'ita'i a'oga mai i le Lunivesite o Massey i Ueligitone. O lo'o faia nei sa'u su'esu'ega fa'apoloketi mo so'u fa'ailoga i le Master's Degree i mata'upu tau a'oa'oga. Ou te fia iloiloina tamaiti o le Pasefika pe fa'apefea ona latou fa'amatalaina le uiga o le a'oa'oina sili ma le a'oa'oga lelei. O le fesili la o la'u su'esu'ega e fa'apea: -O lea le fa'amatalaina e tamaiti e tupuga mai i tagata Pasefika le uiga o le a'oa'oina sili ma le a'oa'oga lelei?

O lea la 'ua 'ou vala'auaina ai oe fa'amolemole 'e te 'auai i lenei su'esu'ega 'ae 'ou te mana'omiaina lau maliega 'e te 'auai.

O le fuafuaga fa'ata'atia a le Minisita o A'oga mo tamaiti o le Pasefika (2013-2017), o lo'o iai se vaega 'autu o lo'o mana'omia ai le sa'ilia o ni 'auala e fa'aleleia ai pe fa'ateleina ai le 'ausia e tamaiti o le Pasefika o ni tulaga maualuluga.

O le 'autu moni 'ua 'ou filifilia ai lenei mata'upu mo la'u su'esu'ega, 'ona ou te talitonu o manatu o tamaiti e tatau 'ona fa'aaogaina e fesoasoani e fa'aleleia ai galuega a matata tau a'oa'oga, ta'ita'l o a'oga ma faiaoga. E iai so'u fa'amoemoega o lenei su'esu'ega, o le'a fesoasoani i ni isi tagata e fa'alauteleina ai ni su'esu'ega i lenei lava mata'upu.

#### **Vala'auliaina o tamaiti o le Pasefika Tausaga 9 ma le 10.**

'O le 'autu o lenei poloketi, o le fa'atalanoaina lea o tamaiti tupuga mai i ni matua Pasefika i ni tama'i vaega laiti (groups) mai i le tausaga 9 ma le 10. O le'a vala'auaina fo'l tamaiti nei e fa'atumuina se pepa tali fesili pu'upu'u. O le'a fesiligia ina i latou i ni itu'aiga a'oa'oga lelei latou te talitonu e mafai 'ona fesoasoani e a'oa'oina ai i latou.

Na fa'apefea 'ona filifiliina 'oe?

O lo'o matou galulue nei ma ni a'oga se tolu i Ueligitone. Sa 'ou fesiligia lau a'oga e fesoasoani mai i se 'auala e tofiaina ai ni tagata 'auai e avea ma vaega fa'apitoa e faia lenei su'esu'ega. E to'avalu le aofa'l o tamaiti i totonu o lenei vaega fa'apitoa.

#### **O a ni a'afiaga o le'a iai?**

Afai o le'a e malie e te 'auai i lenei poloketi, o aiaiga nei o le'a iai.

- 1) O le fonotaga pu'upu'u lava muamua o le'a faia lea i lau a'oga ma o le'a iai 'uma e o le'a 'auai i lenei poloketi. O le'a outou feiloa'l ai ia te a'u ma tamaiti fesoasoani i la'u su'esu'ega. O tamaiti nei o tamaiti Pasefika mai i ni a'oga se lua mai i Ueligitone ma o le'a fesoasoani ia te a'u i le faiga o nei fonotaga. 'O le'a matou fa'amalamalamaina le 'autu moni o le poloketi ma tu'u atu lau pepa o le maliega e te alu ma 'oe i le fale.

- 2) O le'a faia se isi a tatou fonu i le a'oga ma e masalo e na'o se 15-20 minute le 'umi i se taimi o lau malologa 'ae le o le taimi a'oga. O le'a matou tu'uina atu ia te 'oe se pepa tali fesili pu'upu'u (5 fesili) e fa'atumu.
- 3) E 45 minute o le fonu lona tolu ma o le'a matou saunia ni taumafataga mo outou i le aso lea. Fa'amolemole a iai ni taumafa e fa'asaina 'ona e taumafa ai 'ona e fa'ailoa mai lea. A mae'a 'ona fai le taumafataga 'ona 'amata lea o sa tatou fa'atalanoaga i vaega fa'apitoa nei (focus groups). O lenei fa'atalanoaga o le'a fesiligiaina ai 'oe po'o lea sou manatu po'o sou talitonuga fo'i i le uiga/autu moni o le a'oa'oina sili ma le a'oa'oga lelei e fesoasoani ai ia te 'oe i lou ola a'oa'oina. Ou te fa'amoemoe o nei fa'atalanoaga o le'a fesoasoani ai ia te 'oe e fa'asoaina mai ai ni mea 'ua e silafiaina i mea tau a'oa'oga i ni au 'oe lava fa'amatalaga. O lenei talanoaga o le'a pu'eina lea i se masini pu'eleo/pu'eata (ipad – audio/video) ma o le'a matou tusiaina ni nai fa'amatalaga e fesoasoani e fa'amanatu mai ai ia 'l matou tala sa faia. O le masini pu'eata e fesoasoani e fa'amanatu mai ai ia te a'u le talanoaga. Afai e te le taliaina le pu'eina o lou ata 'ae taliaina na'o le masini pu'eleo, fa'amolemole e tatau 'ona fa'ailoa mai i le pepa o maliega lenei. Peita'i, o le'a le fa'aaogaina lou suafa i lenei su'esu'ega ma 'ou te 'ai oi atu fa'amolemole 'ina ia 'aua ne'i fa'aaogaina suafa o ni tagata pe'a pu'eina a tou fa'amatalaga.

**'O le fa'aaogaina o fa'amatalaga sa e fa'asoaina mai:**

O ni fa'amatalaga mai i lenei fa'atalanoaga, o le'a malu ma puipuia ia te a'u ma a'u pule su'esu'e o lo'o i le Univesite i Massey i Ueligitone. A ma'ea loa 'ona faia la'u su'esu'ega, o fa'amatalaga 'uma lava o le'a teu malu lea i lalo o va'ava'aiga fa'apitoa i le vaega fa'apitoa o mea tau a'oa'oga i le Univesite i Massey Palmerston North.

O tagata 'auai 'uma i lenei su'esu'ega e aofia ai la'u 'au su'esu'e fesoasoani o le'a fa'atonuina ina 'ia 'aua ne'i fa'asoaina atu ni fa'amatalaga sa fa'alogo iai i fa'atalanoaga nei i se isi lava tagata.

O se fa'aiu'ga o lenei su'esu'ega o le'a fa'amoemoe e fa'ama'e'aina i le 'amataga o le tausaga 2015 ma 'o le'a lafoina atu lea ia te 'outou ia na fa'atalanoaina i le a'oga pe'a outou manana'o i ni a 'outou kopi. E mafia fo'i 'ona fa'afeso'ota'i mai a'u pe'a 'e mana'omia se kopi.

***O le aia tatau a lou alo e fai ma tagata 'auai.***

E le fa'amamafaina lenei vala'auga. Afai e le fia 'auai lou alo i lenei su'esu'ega, e iai lana aia tatau e:

- Tete'eina ai le taliina o se/ni fesili
- 'ave'eseina ai lona igoa mai i lenei su'esu'ega
- Fesili mai ai i so'o se taimi lava o lenei su'esu'ega
- Fa'asoaina mai ai ni fa'amatalaga ma lona mautinoa e le mafia 'ona fa'alauiloaina lona suafa

- Taofiina o le pu'eina o lona leo po'o lona ata i le masini pu'eleo/pu'eata i so'o se taimi lava o lenei su'esu'ega
- Tu'uina atu ai se fa'ai'uga o lenei su'esu'ega pe'a mae'a 'ona fai.

Suafa o e o lo'o i lenei su'esu'ega fa'apoloketi:

Tagata Su'esu'e: **Lynda Knight-de Blois**

**Phone: 027 603 0580**

[lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com](mailto:lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com)

Pule: **Jenny Poskitt**

06 3569 099 ext 83070

[J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz)

O lenei poloketi 'ua 'uma ona taliaina ma iloiloaina e le Komiti o le Human Ethics i le lunivesite o Massey, Southern A. *Numera apalai 14/17. A iai se fa'afitauli/fa'aletonu i le 'auala o lo'o fa'ataunu'uina ai lenei su'esu'ega fa'amolemole fa'afeso'ota'I ane Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz)*

**Appendix D: Samoan translation of participant consent form**

**PEPA MALIEGA MO E O LE'A 'AUAI I LENEI SU'ESU'EGA**  
**'O matou o le fatu o le fa'amoemoe. Fesili mai'**

Ua 'ou faitauina le pepa o fa'amatalaga 'o le su'esu'ega o le'a faia a le Susuga ia Lynda Knight-de Blois' ma 'ua 'uma 'ona fa'amalamalamaina mai le uiga o lea pepa ia te a'u. 'Ua fa'amalieina 'ato'atoa a'u i tali o a'u fesili ma e mafai 'ona 'ou toe fesili atu i se taimi o i luma pe'a 'ou mana'o iai.

'Ua 'ou malie/ou te le malie e pu'eina a'u fa'amatalaga i se masini pu'e leo

'Ua 'ou malie/ou te le malie e pu'eina lo'u ata po'o ni a'u fa'amatalaga i se masini pu'e ata

'Ua 'ou malie 'ou te 'auai i lenei su'esu'ega i lalo o aiaiga o lo'o ta'ua i le pepa o fa'amatalaga.

Igoa atoa.....

Saini a le tamaitiiti a'oga.....Aso.....

Mo tamaiti o le'a a'afia i le su'esu'ega e i lalo ifo o le 16 tausaga:

'Ua 'ou faitauina le Pepa o fa'amatalaga, ma ua 'ou malie ma fa'atagaina la'u tama o lo'o ta'ua le igoa i luga e 'auai i lenei su'esu'ega.

Suafa o le Matua/tagata va'ava'aia.....

Saini.....Aso.....

O lenei poloketi 'ua 'uma ona taliaina ma iloiloaina e le Komiti o le Human Ethics i le lunivesite o Massey, Southern A. *Numera apalai 14/17. A iai se fa'afitauli/fa'aletonu i le 'auala o lo'o fa'ataunu'uina ai lenei su'esu'ega fa'amolemole fa'afeso'ota'I ane Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz)*

**Appendix E:**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICPANTS

**O matou 'o le fatu 'o le fa'amoemoe. Fesili mai.  
*We are the heart of the matter- ask us!***

I have read Lynda Knight-de Blois' Information Sheet explaining her intended research and I understand what the study is about. I understand that any information collected will be kept confidential and that individual students will not be identified in any reports or publications. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being video recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Signature:****Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

For participants under the age of 16:

I have read the Information Sheet and give permission for my child, named above, to take part in this study.

**Parent/guardian's  
signature:****Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 14/17. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).*



**Appendix F:****INFORMATION SHEET FOR THOSE GIVING CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT AS RESEARCH ASSISTANTS**

*O matou 'o le fatu 'o le faamoemoe – fesili mai!  
We are the heart of the matter- ask us!*

My name is Lynda Knight-de Blois and I am a student at Massey University. I am doing a research project for my Master of Education degree. I want to find out what students of Pacific heritage describe as good teaching and learning. My research question is: *What do Pacific students say is effective teaching and learning for them?*

The Ministry of Education's Pasifika Education Plan (2013-2017) has a focus on helping teachers to find the best ways to improve achievement for Pacific students. My main reason for choosing this research topic is that I believe that students' perspectives should inform the work of educational agencies, leaders and teachers. I hope that this small study can contribute to further work in this area.

**Project Description and Invitation:**

The main part of this project will involve talking to small groups of Year 9 and 10 students who have Pacific Island heritage. They will also be asked to fill out a short questionnaire. They will be asked about the types of teaching that they believe helps them to learn.

I am inviting you to participate in this project as a Research Assistant (RA), but I do need your consent to be involved.

We will be visiting three schools in the Wellington region. There will be around 8 students in each focus group.

**Your Involvement:**

If you agree to take part in this project this is what will be involved:

Each of you will visit 2 or 3 different schools. The times will be carefully arranged and negotiated with your teachers so that you don't miss any NCEA assessments, important lessons or school events. Travel will be in private cars, with either myself or Winona Hewitt. We will pick you up at school to ensure your time away from school is minimised. The time that you spend away from school will vary and will be negotiated with you. It is likely that the total time away from school for most of you will be about 3 ½ hours.

Please see the table below for more specific details. If you agree to take part you will be RA\_\_\_\_\_.

<i>Event:</i>	<i>Who:</i>	<i>How much time off school:</i>	<i>Travel:</i>
<i>Initial meeting at each of the 3 schools and distribution of consent forms and information sheets</i>	<i>Researcher and RA1</i>	<i>School A: 20 mins – break time (RA1)</i>  <i>School B: 1 hour (researcher only)</i>  <i>School C: (researcher only)</i>	<i>None</i>
<i>Meetings for participants to complete the questionnaire</i>	<i>School A: Researcher, RAs 1 &amp; 2</i>  <i>School B: Researcher, RA 1 &amp; 3</i>  <i>School C: Researcher, RA 1</i>	<i>30 mins</i>  <i>90 mins</i>  <i>90 mins</i>	<i>None</i>  <i>Researcher's car</i>  <i>Researcher's car</i>
<i>Focus group interviews (preceded by sharing of food)</i>	<i>School A: Researcher, RAs 1 &amp; 2</i>  <i>School B: Researcher, RAs 1, 3 &amp; 4.</i>  <i>School C: Researcher, RAs 1, 2, 3 &amp; 4.</i>	<i>60 mins</i>  <i>90 mins</i>  <i>120 mins</i>	<i>None</i>  <i>Researcher's car</i>  <i>Researcher and cultural advisor's (mother of RA1 &amp; 3) car</i>
<i>Feedback session with participants to verify a summarised account of what was said</i>	<i>Researcher (possibly RA 1 &amp; 2 in School A in break time)</i>		

As the researcher for this project I need the help of research assistants to:

- 1) Give me feedback about the wording of the questions to be asked in the questionnaire and the focus group interviews.
- 2) Take part in asking the student participants questions during the focus group meetings. You will have a list of questions and we will spend time before the meeting talking about the types of questions to ask and about what we want to find out.

I believe that Year 9 and 10 Pacific students will open up and talk more easily about their learning, their lessons and the teaching styles they like if they are talking to other Pacific students (rather than a pālagi, middle aged researcher). You will have plenty of opportunities to ask me questions about these meetings and anything else about the research project.

All participants, including the research assistants, will be asked to respect the privacy of others and not report what other participants say during the group interviews.

**Project Contacts:**

Researcher: Lynda Knight-de Blois  
Phone: 027 603 0580, 027 522 7607  
[lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com](mailto:lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com)

Supervisor: Jenny Poskitt  
(06) 356 9099 ext. 83070  
[J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz)

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 14/17. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).*

**Appendix G:**CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS***O mātou o'le fatu 'o le fa'amoemoe-fesili mai******We are the heart of the matter- ask us!***

I have read Lynda Knight-de Blois' Information Sheet explaining her intended research and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being video recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

**Student Signature:****Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

For participants under the age of 16:

I have read the Information Sheet and give permission for my child, named above, to take part as a research assistant in this study.

**Parent/guardian's  
signature:****Date:**

.....

**Full Name - printed**

.....

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 14/17. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).*

**Appendix H:**

## INFORMATION SHEET FOR PRINCIPALS AND BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

Dear Principal and Board Chair,

I am a student at Massey University and am currently doing research for my Master of Education degree on Pacific students' perspectives of effective teaching and learning. I am seeking your informed consent to allow me to invite students from ..... College to participate in this research and hold 2 focus group interviews at your school.

The accompanying information sheet outlines the basic purpose of my study and also some of the processes involved in the project. I am keen that this research interrupts day-to-day school operations as little as possible and any decisions made about the place and times of meetings with students will be negotiated with the principal or nominated member of staff.

I am undertaking this study as a part-time Massey student and not in my role as a review officer in the Education Review Office. If I should be scheduled by ERO to review at your school within the next few years I will declare a conflict of interest. This can be done without giving details and therefore your school's participation in this research can remain confidential. Please know that I have current full teacher registration. (165254)

I am interested in what students of Pacific heritage describe as effective teaching and learning for them. I hope they will find that sharing their ideas and perspectives will prove to be a rewarding experience for them as individuals and that this research may be of benefit to your school. At the end of the project I will provide you with a summary of the findings and, if requested, I will present them to a staff and/or board meeting. It is my hope that this study can contribute to the emerging research about Pacific education. If you consent to students from your school participating in my research I will contact you to discuss and address any of your comments or queries about this project.

Yours sincerely

Lynda Knight-de Blois

[lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com](mailto:lyndaknightdeblois@gmail.com)

Phone: 027 6030580

Supervisor: Jenny Poskitt

[J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz)

06 356 0900, ext 8635

Institute of Education

Collinson Village, Turitea

Massey University

*This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, Application 14/17. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern A, telephone 06 350 5799 x 84459, email [humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicsoutha@massey.ac.nz).*

## Appendix I: Codes for Analysis

R1	positive relationship, bond/connection, teacher gets along with me
R2	treat students equally
R3	cruisy, kicked back, relaxed
P4	explain until I understand
P5	teacher doesn't move too fast through learning
R6	high expectations
R7	pushes you to the max
R8	encourages me
P9	1:1 talk
P10	1:1 talk/tutoring – but not in class
D11	vibe of teacher
P12	practical activities, interactive, active
D13	strict
P14	no seating plan
P15	learning in groups
P16	interesting, not stuff you already know
P17	variety, not just teacher talk
D18	teacher being expressive, interesting when they talk
P19	variety of learning environments
P20	teacher who knows the subject
P21	not long periods of reading, writing, listening
P22	choice (eg of text)
P23	understands me/knows me
R24	listens
P25	learning based in cultural/family context
P26	teacher uses digital technology to support learning
R27	accepts me for who I am
D28	funny, uses humour
P29	plays music/lets me listen to music
P30	helps me/cares about me
P31	small class size
P32	visual learning prompts in class
P33	learning in desks (not variety of furniture to choose from)
P34	gives homework
P35	worksheets
R36	doesn't get stressful
P37	fun
P38	find out students' learning methods
R39	doesn't let anyone feel left out
P40	classroom culture where we can be open
P41	learning about current things
R42	not embarrass me when I'm struggling
P43	subjects that are low stress, less thinking
P44	learning that relates to us students (generational culture)

- P45 structure
- P46 not too much homework
- P47 a teacher who is prepared
- R48 gives good advice
- R49 motivates me



### Appendix J: Focus Group Interview: Frequency of responses

	School A	School B	School C
<b>Relationships</b>	R1: III R2: III R6: I R7: III	R1: I R23: I R24: I R6: IIII	R27: I
<b>Dispositions</b>	D: II D13: I D3: II D18: II	D18: II	D3: I
<b>Pedagogy</b>	P4: I P9: IIII P34: I P10: III P26: II P12: III P16: III P21: IIII II P14: I P15: II P17: III P19: I P20: I P22: I	P5: III P9: III P4: IIII IIII P17: II P12: I P15: II P25: II P22: I P26: I P21: III	P4: IIII II P5: I P9: I P16: II P28: I P29: I P15: I P12: IIII P26: I P30: II P31: I P32: I P33: I P21: IIII P17: I P25: I P41: I

## Appendix K: Focus Group Interview Schedule

1. **An effective teacher:** Think of a teacher who has helped you learn in a subject such as English, Maths, Science, Social Sciences. What made them a good teacher? What helped you to learn in their classes? Think of a time when you found something difficult and you learnt/understood – a light bulb moment: What helped you? Was this because of something the teacher did? – Tell us about it.
2. **Your most enjoyable lessons:** What types of lessons and learning activities hook you into your learning and keep you interested? What advice would you give a teacher to plan a really interesting English or Maths lesson in which you learned easily?
3. **Your most boring lessons:** What learning activities bore you? What makes lessons go really slowly?
4. **Ineffective teaching:** I don't learn much when teachers... What types of teaching and learning don't work for you?
5. **The ideal teacher who keeps me interested and helps me learn:** (a drawing of an anonymous male and female teacher (A1 size) is put up on the wall. Students are invited to contribute words that represent characteristics of their ideal teacher. They, or the RAs, write these on the chart around the pictures. Students are then asked to copy down on to post-its the three attributes they believe are most important.
6. **What else, apart from what the teacher does, helps you to learn?**
7. **Conclusion:** Is there anything else we have missed? Is there anything else anyone wants to say?

**Appendix L: Prompt sheet for Focus Group Interviews**

1. A good, effective teacher
  
2. Most enjoyable lessons
  
3. Boring lessons
  
4. Ineffective teaching
  
5. Describe the ideal teacher
  
6. What else helps you to learn?
  
7. Anything else