



CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGIES / OVERVIEW

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Four strategies to effectively support Pasifika students

The term 'Pasifika' is used in educational contexts to refer to students and families who originate from the Pacific Islands or identify with the Pacific Islands in terms of ancestry or heritage. This means they derive from a diverse range of cultural and language backgrounds, identifying with one or more of the Pacific groups, including Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Tokelau, or Tuvalu. There are, of course, many inter- and intra-ethnic variations between people of these groups, and while some identify common values and beliefs across these groups, not all people accept the label Pasifika. Indeed, it would be mistaken to view Pasifika as a single ethnicity. An awareness of the diversity amongst Pasifika groups and individuals can help prevent stereotyping.

Improving outcomes for Pasifika students is an urgent priority for educators in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a group Pasifika students achieve at the lowest level of all cultural groups, generally performing and remaining within the lowest quartile for achievement. The Ministry of Education's *Pasifika Education Plan (2013-2017)* urges schools to support Pasifika students to be 'demanding, vibrant, dynamic, successful Pasifika learners, secure and confident in their identities, languages and cultures, navigating through all curriculum areas such as the arts, sciences, technology, social sciences and mathematics'. This requires teaching that is culturally responsive to students.

There is no single recipe for cultural responsiveness, and the diversity among Pasifika peoples makes it impossible to define a single pedagogy for Pasifika students. However, research has identified that the principal reasons for the poor achievement of Pasifika students are related to teachers having deficit views of Pasifika students and their potential for learning, failing to develop strong and positive relationships with Pasifika students, failing to understand Pasifika students' identities, and using ineffective pedagogies. By contrast, research demonstrates that high achieving Pasifika students perceived the important factors contributing to their success to be the maintenance of their cultural identity, high expectations by teachers and parents, home-school relationships, parental support and love, the role of the church, and the use of ICT (Fletcher et al., 2016).

Culturally responsive teaching can be enacted when teachers work on the following four areas:

- Having high expectations for Pasifika students.
- Knowing students as individuals, the cultures with which they identify and what this means for them.
- Developing strong relationships with Pasifika students and families.
- Enacting effective pedagogies which are discursive and collaborative.

Have high expectations for Pasifika students

Why this is important

Research demonstrates that teachers' implicit and explicit beliefs and understandings about Pasifika students can be the biggest barrier to improving student outcomes. In research comparing teacher and student perspectives on poor achievement, teachers believed Pasifika students' low achievement was due to poor behaviour related to Pasifika values. Teachers often attributed poor behaviour to the discipline students received at home, believing it either too strict or not strict enough, so that students couldn't cope with the freedoms permitted at school. The students, however, said it was the attitudes and actions of the teacher that were the cause of their poor behaviour. Negative relationships between teachers and students were felt to be a principal cause of poor behaviour and consequent low achievement (Spiller, 2012).

Deficit thinking, generalised assumptions and stereotypical views of Pasifika students in particular tend to encourage teachers to use pedagogical strategies with reduced cognitive demand, limiting the complexity of students' learning. For example, teachers often believe that most Pasifika children require concrete materials and repetition in order to learn. They limit students to simpler problems and do not engage them with higher order ideas or in thinking abstractly, with the result that students are unable to extend their knowledge.

Research also indicates that Pasifika students are aware of their teachers' low expectations. Teachers' low expectations influence their choice of teaching strategies, including giving work that is too easy, doing students' work for them, giving simple instructions, repeating instructions, and singling out Pasifika students for attention. Students recognise that teachers have high expectations when they give them problem-solving activities and time to think rather than telling students what to do and explaining solutions to them (Spiller, 2012).

What it looks like

Quality teaching based on high expectations and challenging learning tasks are likely to support Pasifika students to make the greatest progress. Students are more likely to meet expectations to do well if they have opportunities to take charge of their learning and are scaffolded to build on what they already know. When schools and teachers have high expectations then parents are also likely to expect and support high levels of achievement for students.

You need to be aware of stereotypical patterns of thinking and behaviour related to Pasifika students, and instead

- Focus on students' personal and ethnic diversity, and ensure that when, what and how they learn reflects and reinforces their identity.
- Understand students' behaviour as specific to the situation and influenced by social norms, rather than characteristic of a cultural group.
- Co-construct the curriculum and involve students in assessment as a way of ensuring you are responding to individual students' specific strengths and needs rather than operating by generalised assumptions.

Know your students as individuals, the cultures with which they identify and what this means for them.

Why this is important

Planning interactions and behaviours without taking into account students' social and cultural backgrounds is detrimental to student progress. However, in thinking about and preparing work for their students, teachers often draw on the identity they have constructed for their students based on their own personal beliefs and experiences about different cultural identities. Instead, get to know your students as individuals through conversation and classroom activities which enable students share their cultures and perspectives.

Pasifika students want teachers who know their culture and know about them as people. They want to read, learn, and write about their own culture. They want their teachers to care about them. Research shows that more than two thirds of teachers make a point of finding out which Pasifika culture their students and families identify with (Bonne & Spiller, 2017). This is important as the label Pasifika, rather than Tongan, Samoan, Niuean, Fijian, Tokelauan or Cook Islander, may limit identity formation and disguise important differences. It also is important that teachers affirm their students' diverse personal identities. This does not occur through the use of curriculum units or classroom celebrations that focus on different cultures, which tend to reinforce an assumed and generalised identity for Pasifika students. Instead, teachers need to recognise that students have the right to construct their own identities. These unique, personal and multi-faceted identities can be better affirmed through sensitive listening and understanding. Knowing your students' identities refers to knowing who they are as people rather than simply which groups they belong to.

Aside from an ethnic identity, Pasifika students develop multiple identities in regard to diverse contexts, including home, school, church, sports groups, music groups, part-time employment, and socialising with friends. Often these different contexts are quite separately associated with different identities: a student might be a New Zealand citizen, Samoan and German, Christian, female and an All Blacks supporter, but none of these identities is the student's only identity. In order to present a particular identity, students may choose to conceal cultural behaviours, including the use of their own language, in the classroom. However, valuing students' cultures and reflecting them in the curriculum and school culture will enable students to engage openly in cultural behaviours and understandings.

What it looks like

Finding out about and responding to the identities of your students means learning about the specific cultural practices and languages that influence students outside of school. Cultural responsiveness does not mean just learning about others. Developing an awareness of your own cultural identity is an important tool for developing cultural understandings. This means critically reflecting on and coming to understand how identity, language and culture influence your own life and your own identity. In so doing, you can develop an appreciation of complexity rather than reinforce stereotypical and essentialist understandings of cultural differences that may leave some students feeling they are not understood or accepted. Students also want to know about their teachers, and their lives outside school.

- Share information about your own cultural identity and personal story. Find opportunities for self-disclosure, which encourages students to reciprocate. When you share a personal story, students believe they can reveal more about themselves by sharing their personal stories. You can also, for example, share stories about times you have made mistakes to help students feel more comfortable about making mistakes themselves. All of this supports the development of strong relationships.
- Acknowledge students' choice in the ways in which they identify themselves and are identified. Avoid inappropriate assumptions and ensure that, when you attempt to validate or affirm Pasifika identities, cultures and knowledge, this is not based on your own views of a Pasifika identity but on those of the student.

- Set up activities that involve students in meaningful exchanges to enable the class to learn about each other. Ask students to identify similar or relevant practices in their own and others' culture. For example, when learning French vocabulary for mealtimes, ask students to describe a typical meal in their culture/family, or, when learning about historic graves, ask how death and the dead are treated in different cultural groups.
- Encourage and support students to maintain their own cultural identity. Beware of putting Pasifika students and their cultures on show, or developing a 'tourist' approach to diversity, in which students experience particular cultures in the same way as a tourist might, tasting foods, observing songs, music and dances, and learning a few words of the language or facts about a country. This does not help students feel understood or develop a sense of identity, and may lead to students being unwilling to identify as Pasifika in order to distance themselves from the identities promoted.
- Seek professional development not from workshops or books but by participating in your local community. You might consider participating an event with your local Samoan community, for example, or attending a Tongan church service.

Understanding and using the cultural knowledge and experiences of students is a vital and integral part of planning curriculum and pedagogy. Once you know your students better, you can construct relevant teaching content to capture their interest and build on their prior knowledge by developing learning situations based on what is important to students, and ensuring that texts used by students make links with students' interests and prior knowledge. An easy way to do this is to use the free reading texts provided by the Ministry of Education about different cultural groups that incorporate most Pasifika languages and cultures.

Develop strong relationships with Pasifika students and families

Why this is important

All students, but particularly struggling and low-achieving students, require a positive relationship with their teacher. They need to feel that they belong and that they are connected to the group. Pasifika students prefer teachers who are responsive, reasonable and available, who teach from their hearts and who regularly describe and frame them as competent.

Respect is a very important notion. Students report that, when they feel they are not being respected by the teacher, they respond by ignoring the teacher and avoiding participation. For Pasifika students, the teacher needs to earn the respect of the students in order to gain legitimate authority in the class. Pasifika students want the teacher to be a strong authority figure in the classroom, so that there is order and discipline, but they do not want teachers to act as substitute parents, which they see as an insult.

Pasifika parents want their children to have a good education and are committed to supporting them. However, the way in which parents support their children can differ from what schools and teachers expect. As the teacher is seen as the authority in the classroom, the one with the responsibility to impart knowledge to the students, parents believe it is their role to ensure that their children respect the teacher, behave well and do their work. In other words, they focus more on behaviour, assuming that good behaviour will enable the teacher to teach them to achieve high levels of performance.

This total trust in the school and teachers can also work to disadvantage Pasifika students, as families are prevented from challenging the teachers, content, or teaching methods. If there is an issue with attainment, parents blame their children rather than challenge the teaching. This leads teachers to believe that the parents accept poor levels of learning for their children. It is therefore important to build relationships with Pasifika parents to find ways to improve their understanding of, and confidence in discussing, school related activities. Yet research reports that Pasifika parents feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in school (Fletcher et al., 2009). The development of a shared perspective on student learning is hindered by the difficulties of cross-cultural communication, work and family commitments, second language use and the structures of meetings, which reduce the capacity of Pasifika families to express their views.

What it looks like

Treat students with dignity. This means treating every student as a unique individual, listening to them, and responding respectfully to their ideas, questions and concerns. It means avoiding interactions which assign blame, show distrust or disbelief of students, and even interactions that single out Pasifika students for help (instead, allow them to ask for help or ask their friends for help instead).

- Don't use put-downs or impatience, or blame students for what they don't know. Avoid authoritarian actions and words (shouting, not listening, making accusations, and hurtful comments) which make Pasifika students feel as if they are constantly being punished.
- Avoid programmes in which students change classes for particular subjects (interchanging), recognising that an ongoing relationship with the same teacher is crucial.
- Speak to students respectfully and treat them as adults or equals. Show respect by pronouncing and spelling students' names correctly.
- Develop caring interactions, emphasising reciprocal relationships.
- Ensure engagement in both public and private interactions with students, focusing on qualities of trust, support, and companionship.
- Interact with families to try to understand the reality of students' lives.
- Ensure students see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

Strong and positive relationships with Pasifika parents encourage parents to feel comfortable coming into school, getting involved, and sharing views.

- Find ways to bring Pasifika parents into school. Involve them in running cross-cultural activities and events or provide opportunities such as adult education courses, a fruit and vegetable cooperative, or access to computers.
- Be present as children and parents are arriving each day, and greet families daily. Visit Pasifika families in their homes.
- Appoint a Pasifika liaison person in individual or clusters of schools. This might enable families to use their first language in meetings, for example, which aids their confidence and willingness to ask questions and express their views.
- Share data with families. This will increase their knowledge of the school system and their child's achievement within it, so that they can advocate for their child by inquiring about outcomes and demanding better outcomes.

Enact effective pedagogies which are discursive and collaborative

Why this is important

Research finds that, in learner-centred and discursive classrooms which provide students with opportunities to actively listen, support and question one another, there are more meaningful conversations, better student-teacher relationships, and greater engagement and achievement (Conway & Richards, 2017). A discursive approach can help students make connections between the meanings they gain from their own experiences and the meanings they gain from their school learning, which strengthens their understanding of school concepts. Pasifika students report that they want challenging work, opportunities to do the work for themselves, and space and time to think. When students feel powerless over their learning, they may display silence, compliance and conformity while simultaneously disengaging from the curriculum.

Some Pasifika students report that, although they enjoy group work and discussing learning with peers generally, they are daunted when they move into larger classes. Most important for improving Pasifika students' achievement is to listen and respond to students and their actions. This means hearing students' perspectives and acting on them, as well as examining data to make decisions about staffing, resources, teaching approaches and programmes, and avoiding a one-size-fits-all teaching approach for all Pasifika students.

Pasifika students can be fearful of making mistakes or finding themselves in situations where they might display a lack of knowledge. They may not like to take risks in the context of a whole class or group discussion, for fear of the ridicule and shaming that accompanies failure. They may not be assertive in class, for example, by asking questions or asking for help. Research argues that Pasifika students prefer to fit in with cultural expectations to listen passively and obey, and can be affected by others' noisy and disruptive behaviour and ineffective classroom management which hinder their ability to learn (Fletcher et al., 2009).

As some Pasifika students have to navigate and transition between different worlds, they have competing demands placed on them which may affect their achievement. Teachers might be able to draw on Pasifika students' understanding of co-operative venture, respect for elders and the church, and values of reciprocity, service, spirituality and family within their teaching practices.

Raising students' self-esteem and self-discipline requires the inclusion of the students' languages and an appreciation of their cultural activities such as music and dance. The use of students' own languages has been found to promote successful learning experiences, increase students' engagement and enable them to gain a more sophisticated understanding of concepts. For example, research in mathematics found that students demonstrated more sophisticated higher level reasoning when learning incorporated their social customs, values and language (Hunter et al., 2016). Using a home language can support students to better understand the teacher's questions or the set activity, and to find the right English words to represent what they want to communicate. This provides students with equitable learning opportunities and, when students are empowered to help each other because they can use a language the teacher doesn't understand, helps equalise power relations in the classroom.

Pasifika students often acquire and practice literacy skills in the context of their church, therefore using the processes and texts that are familiar from church can support students in gaining school literacy skills. However, it is important to be aware that challenging a Biblical text is considered inappropriate. This can create a conflict with school discussions in which active discussion, dispute, debate and critical questioning are encouraged. These discursive activities might make some Pasifika students uncomfortable.

What it looks like

Explore culturally appropriate teaching approaches and resources with students and try to meet students' needs from a cultural perspective. Flexibility and individuality are important features of a culturally responsive curriculum, and learner-centred classrooms provide the teacher with time to discuss learning with individual students, respond to students' questions and give feedback. Students have more time with, and access to, the teacher.

Students are supported to use their own languages in class, although some students can experience concerns related to their ability to speak the language competently, family pressure to speak their indigenous language, or peer pressure about speaking another language. The aim is to support students' expression in their indigenous language, and preserve students' languages as a source of interest and pride for the student. Even the slightest recognition of a student's first language helps to build their confidence and sense of being cared for.

- Plan occasions for collaborative learning. This might involve researching different areas of a topic in groups or pairs, or asking students to share experiences or personal ideas or to make decisions by reaching consensus. Have students report back to the class to open up further dialogue.
- Consider a buddy system for Pasifika students to allow them to support each other. Be careful that you don't focus these pairs on repetitive and concrete activities, but encourage work that involves higher level thinking.
- Empower students to take control of their own learning. This could involve using a system in which, after class teaching, students break into groups that 'feel able to work by themselves', that 'feel confident but would like to tag back with the teacher at the end of the lesson', or that 'want to continue working with the teacher'.
- Ensure that students don't feel failure. Avoid singling them out and putting them on the spot. However, this doesn't mean minimising discussion or reducing the complexity of work.
- Draw explicitly on your Pasifika students' understandings of the concept of family, in order to shape expectations for positive and collective interactions in class. Get students to talk about their experience of this in everyday life, for example, sharing chores, or preparing a meal or umu. Then create expectations around working together to help others understand, and sharing the workload for equal participation and collective responsibility in group work.
- Offer students opportunities to use their home languages.
- Value the literacies and skills that Pasifika students have gained in their first language, and make clear connections with school literacy so that students can build upon these.
- Make connections between Pasifika languages and Māori language. Ask students to create a Pasifika dictionary of example phrases in different Pasifika languages and their translations.
- Ensure second language students are assessed to see if they require support.
- Highlight specialist, unusual, or culturally specific terms within texts to support students' understanding. Pasifika students can usually be quite skilled in decoding text while struggling with understanding the meanings of words and therefore comprehension of the text.
- Integrate Pasifika culture into classroom content, for example, bringing Pasifika music, dance, drama, art, myths and legends, literature and journals into classroom activities, or basing numeracy or literacy activities in Pasifika contexts.
- Notice students' responses to different activities – do they become animated in discussion of certain topics, more engaged when they use their own language, when they are challenged or when they play interactive games?

What's your first step?

You might work collaboratively with students in order to develop plans and strategies to promote, for example:

- Collaborative and respectful relations in the classroom
- A shared understanding of diverse Pasifika cultures and identities, and their similarities and differences
- A common vision for excellence and a shared definition of success

Use your informal and formal monitoring and evaluation of Pasifika students' progress to inform your practice and plan for change.

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