

Navigating for Pasifika in education- *conversations
with mentors*

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ABSTRACT

This study explored how schools can disrupt current practice to improve outcomes for Pasifika. The study identified the mind shift that needs to take place in schools by teachers, its leaders, and the community the school serves to improve outcomes for Pasifika and the characteristics that teachers can possess to be able to work effectively with Pasifika.

A qualitative methodology was employed for this research using semi structured interviews of four key adults who work closely with Pasifika students in a school. Purposive sampling was used as a method to select these adults because they all have unique roles in the school that require a close working relationship with our Pasifika community.

The findings from this study indicate that teachers and leaders must firstly be conscious about the part they play in constructing and reinforcing the stereotypes for Pasifika before they are able to improve outcomes for Pasifika. The findings identified some significant knowledge and attributes that teachers need or can build upon to work successfully with Pasifika in schools. In this way, educators would be demonstrating *vā* and then to *teu le vā* so that they can navigate Pasifika through education.

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I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

My years of teaching overseas and in New Zealand brings me to this point where I have the chance to write about education for Pasifika in New Zealand. I am a first-generation New Zealander of Tokelauan descent who grew up in South Auckland in the 80's. I am now a Deputy Principal in a large Auckland secondary school with the opportunity to contribute to education. I identify as a New Zealand born Pacific Islander and am therefore included as "Pasifika".

The term "Pasifika" is used as a collective term to refer to all peoples born in New Zealand and overseas who identify with the island cultures of:

Samoa, Cook Islands, Tonga, Niue, Tokelau, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tuvālu, and other Pasifika or mixed heritages. The term includes a variety of combinations of ethnicities, recent migrants or first, second, third, fourth, and subsequent generations of New Zealand-born Pasifika peoples (Ferguson, Gorinski, Mara, Samu, 2008).

The term has been criticised by scholars because it homogenises all Pacific peoples together (whether born in New Zealand or not) and does not allow for the difference of the many ethnicities presented (Anae, 2010). By using the term, we continue to perpetuate the idea that all Pacific Peoples are the same.

However, Samu (1998) argues that the term "Pasifika" is appropriate because it, "originated from us" and "being able to define ourselves is an issue of control" (as cited in Bruce Ferguson et al., 2008, p. 5). Samu (1998) further suggests that the term needs to be regularly revisited and challenged to see what underlying assumptions are made when used. An example is when Pasifika are labelled as "priority learners" which initially focussed attention on lifting achievement but has become "not so positive in

terms of deficit theorising about Pasifika (and Māori) as a priority who needed teachers urgent help and care” (Samu, 2006, p. 147). The term is problematic but will be used with respect for, and understanding of, the limitations of the term. The term collectivises the peoples in my study and because it is uniquely from the Pacific, fits the ontological viewpoint.

My early years at my South Auckland secondary school helped me to understand that I was different. Unlike a lot of my Pasifika peers, I was placed in a top stream class where I was the only brown face and felt disconnected from my peers. The others who looked like me were mostly in the “bottom classes” and the perception at the time was that they were doomed to fail.

This perception is confirmed by recent statistics released by the Ministry of Education where Pasifika experience lower regular attendance and chronic absence rates compared to Asian and European students (Sun, n.d.). Consequently, Pasifika perform at a lower rate in NCEA Level 2 and above compared to Asian and European students, but sadly, at a higher rate than Māori who achieve at the lowest rate (Ministry of Education, 2021). Pasifika also feature prominently in the stand down and suspension rates for schools. Recent data has revealed that “schools continued to stand-down, suspend or exclude Māori students and expel Pacific students at the highest rates” (Sun, n.d.-a, p. 4).

Pasifika, as a group, are one of the largest growing populations in New Zealand. By 2040, most students in Aotearoa/New Zealand primary schools will be Māori and/or Pasifika and that, “This change will occur within the working life of teachers who are currently being trained or inducted into teaching” (Alton-Lee et al., 2003, p. 5) With low academic performance, high stand down and suspension rates and an increasing population, it is imperative that schools do something differently for Pasifika. Exactly what this imperative looks like for educators is the challenge.

The government released the latest iteration of the Pacific Education plan in 2020 which helps to guide educators working with Pasifika for the next 10 years (New Zealand & Ministry of Education, 2020). This

document includes a set of guidelines and initiatives supported by research. This strategy is focussed on its vision for improving Pasifika achievement but lacks a detailed action plan for schools and educators to address these challenges.

In my role as a school leader, implementing the changes needed is slow for all concerned because values and assumptions are being challenged, in a predominantly *Pālagi* or European system. This concept is explored by Gorinski and Fraser (2006) who state that “families from a culture other than that from which the underpinning values and understandings of an education system originate, may be disadvantaged within the system” (p. 9). They suggest that Pasifika, as a minority, are not included in the dominant social and cultural context of a school and are therefore disadvantaged.

Schools need to be bold and rethink their approach to improving Pasifika student outcomes. Firstly, educators need to decolonise their minds of hegemonic ideologies. Schools are political sites involved in the construction, control, and containment of oppressed cultural populations (Freire, 1968). This suggests that schools construct and reinforce the stereotypes for Pasifika and Māori. Educators must be conscious of this fact, to change outcomes for Pasifika and Māori.

Freire (1968) asks schools to engage with Pasifika in a critical understanding of their world so that they can help transform conditions in schools for themselves and our society. Stepping into the Pasifika world will enable educators to unveil the contradictions of educational policy and practice that dehumanize Pasifika and indigenous and minority populations (Freire, 1968). Schools can then work with Pasifika to disrupt and change current practice (Darder, 2014).

Adopting a Freirean philosophy to my research asks me to listen to and reflect deeply about Pasifika from a Pasifika viewpoint and explore their needs and aspirations. I am very aware that I am a product of this *Pālagi* system and have worked in this system for many years. Despite being Pasifika, I need to firstly understand, then challenge the construction, control, and containment of Pasifika to be able to do

something as a Pasifika leader in a school. This study's objective and aim is encapsulated in three questions which have formed the basis for this research study.

Research questions

1. What educational aspirations do our Pacific students and families have?
2. What are important Pacific values held by Pacific students?
3. What aspects of Pacific culture need to be embraced by a school?

This study will use a focus group comprising of four key adults who work closely with Pasifika students in my school and in this way will use purposive sampling as a method to select these adults. They all have unique roles in the school that require a close working relationship with our Pasifika community. A further semi-structured interview with each adult will help to elicit the aspirations and values that Pasifika students have. The interviewer will ask them what they do to help their Pasifika students and families realise their dreams.

These adults work successfully with Pasifika students to enhance their achievement and show how schools constructed as places of learning, whether intentionally or not, are used as places to contain and control Pasifika. By capturing their voice, I hope to achieve the aim of my research which is to find out how schools can disrupt current practice to improve outcomes for Pasifika.

AN OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

Chapter One has presented an overview of this research project, a rationale that justifies the study and an outline of the research aims and questions.

Chapter Two identifies how education is structured with the purpose being for qualification, socialization, and subjectification. The literature illuminates an understanding of the Pasifika world and how this viewpoint can at times be opposed to the hegemonic beliefs and structures created in our schools. Furthermore, the literature examines how schools might be able to find ways to disrupt current practice and enable leaders and teachers in schools to navigate Pasifika towards improved outcomes.

In Chapter Three, I have outlined the methodology and research methods used in the research project. The reasons and rationale for the selected methodology and methods are discussed. The focus groups and interview methods are outlined. The collection and analysis of data is explained. The crucial ethical considerations central to this research are documented and issues around reliability and validity are discussed

The findings and discussion of the findings are presented in Chapter Four highlighting three key themes which discuss life for Pasifika, the *Pālagi* world and teacher skills and attributes.

Chapter Five draws on significant conclusions and makes recommendations for possible action in schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the literature that addresses the rationale of this study and examines my research questions. Freire (1968) suggests educators need to decolonise their minds of hegemonic beliefs to understand and explore the needs of Pasifika in education. Educators must be cognisant of the part they play in maintaining and reinforcing the hegemonic values (Biesta, 2020; Freire 1968; Giroux, 2018). This is the first step to improving Pasifika student outcomes.

Inspirational educators can help in transforming schools and their communities (Biesta, 2020; Freire 1968; Giroux, 2018). Firstly, educators must develop their understanding of the pressures Pasifika face in Aotearoa society (Jones, 1986; Nash, 2000; Reynolds, 2019; Taleni, 2018; Tamasese et al., 2005).

Additionally, educators need to understand the societal hegemonic restraints that impact Pasifika so they can intervene and innovate change (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Nash, 2000; Tamasese et al., 2005).

Adopting a Pasifika “way of being” will help teachers intervene to do something different in their practice. Specifically, educators can improve their relationships with Pasifika by understanding and utilising the concept of *vā*. Furthermore, building educators skills and attributes to *teu le vā* will assist them to *edge walk* with Pasifika in schools (Anae, 2010; Devine et al., 2012; Reynolds, 2019a). Educators who challenge hegemonic restraints by helping teachers build better relationships can improve educational outcomes for Pasifika.

Consequently, I have made these aspects the focus for my literature review.

Understanding the Pasifika world

Explaining the Pasifika world first supports the epistemological stance adopted for this research. One must understand what Pasifika people value before an examination of what works (and what is not working) for Pasifika in education can be actioned.

Pasifika parents have high expectations and aspirations for their children in Aotearoa education. This is despite the consistent low scholastic achievement rates of Pasifika children over the years (Alton-Lee et al., 2003). Many Pasifika parents have high educational aspirations for their children because they perceive education as a way to lift their families out of poverty through higher paying jobs (Tamasese et al., 2005). Therefore, Pasifika parents can place intense pressure on their children to succeed. In some cases, parents impede their child's progress because their aspirations do not match with their child's scholastic achievement (Nash, 2000).

Many Pasifika families make significant sacrifices to get their children into what they perceive as "better" schools to obtain a "better" education. Pasifika families will do everything within their power to ensure their children are successful in education (Nash, 2000). Pasifika family expectations and aspirations do not always match with the low achievement rates, and one must question what educators are doing in schools and the classrooms to perpetuate these results (Alton-Lee et al., 2003).

Pasifika want school leaders and specifically, the principal, to develop a culture of relational trust so that parents can speak honestly and have their concerns heard. Furthermore, the principal needs to make sure that these concerns are actioned (Taleni, 2018). The principal needs to have a "Pasifika heart" so that meaningful learning can take place, with opportunities provided to students for Pasifika students to grow their cultural identity (Taleni, 2018). Undoubtedly a school leadership can improve Pasifika achievement, but there are other considerations.

Supporting Pasifika languages and cultures is key in helping Pasifika form their identities. Pasifika can achieve equitable learning opportunities if teachers encourage students' home language in the classroom (Hunter et al., 2016) When Pasifika families can access school related information in their home language, they can better support their child's learning and engagement and feel more comfortable in large formal (school) meetings (Hunter et al., 2016). Furthermore, self-esteem for Pasifika is improved when they can speak their language (Matika et al., 2021)

The concept of vā

Nurturing and caring for family and community is of utmost importance to Pasifika and can be done by looking after *vā*. The concept of *vā* has been linked across the Pasifika to describe the *spatial* understanding of relationships. According to Mila-Schaaf (2006) *vā* is "the imagined space that we 'feel' as opposed to see and is not empty but is space that relates" (p.10). Furthermore, *vā* can be described as "a spatial understanding of relationships which operates multi-dimensionally across spiritual, social and physical domains" where "each relationship has a *vā* which both connects and separates those involved" (Reynolds, 2019b, p. 26).

There are subtle differences in the understanding of *vā* between Pacific nations which is important to consider because it acknowledges that not all Pacific cultures are the same. While *vā* brings Pasifika together, it also separates them in terms of language, culture, and identity. The Samoan understanding of *vā* is adopted in this paper because, as a Tokelauan researcher, the definition is similar to my understanding because of the physical and cultural proximity of Samoa to Tokelau. When considering *vā*, the "self" can only contain meaning when relating to other people. The *vā* cannot be separated from an individual's family members, as the family helps to create the individual. As such, there is no concept of individual or self (Tamasese et al., 2005). Young people born and brought up in New Zealand are less

influenced by the concept of *vā* but still find this concept relevant if faced with crisis (Tamasese et al., 2005).

Furthermore, some relationships are more important and special for Pasifika. The *vā* that exists between brother and sister, for example, is sacred (*tapu*) and a brother must ensure their sister is safe and looked after (Tamasese et al., 2005). The Samoan spiritual understanding of *vā* extends to “*Vā tapuia*” which includes “all Samoan relations, between human beings, with the dead, with the divine, and with nature” (Anae, 2010, p. 12). The understanding of *vā* in relationships reveals the connectedness that Pasifika students have to family, their community and beyond to Pasifika role models and/or teachers (Anae, 2010).

Church is a way that Pasifika connect with family and is therefore important in the lives of Pasifika. Furthermore, Pasifika can engage with their languages and identities at church which helps to create a sense of wellbeing (Matika et al., 2021). Church not only supports Pasifika spiritual wellbeing but is seen as an extension of the family. Pasifika will often give their best efforts and items to the church to show their *tautua* (service), *ola fa’aleagaga* (spirituality), and *fa’aaloalo* (respect) (Faleolo, 2020). These key values and principles are some that underpin *vā* in the Samoan culture; “*alofa* (love), *tautua* (service), *ola fa’aleagaga* (spirituality), *fa’aaloalo* (respect), *aloaia* (integrity), *agamalu* (humility), *fetausia’i* (reciprocity), *finau* (perseverance), *fa’asinomaga* (belonging), and *ta’ita’i* (leadership)” and helps us to understand that for Pasifika “life is cultivated with commitment and sacrifice for your people, community, and society” (Talen, 2018, p. 182).

Applying the concept of vā in education

Understanding *vā* and the values and principles that underlies Pasifika culture can help educators begin to understand how to improve Pasifika educational outcomes. Reynolds (2019) suggests that every relationship in an educational setting has *vā*; in the classroom, between teacher and students, and

between the students themselves. If educators firstly understand what *vā* is and then how to nurture *vā* with their students, then they will be able to foster relationships that are beneficial to all people in education. When one focuses on *vā*, they would be closely examining their “intentions and conscious actions that influences the nature of our relationships with others” (Mila-Schaaf, 2006, p. 10).

Educators could develop and maintain stronger family- school partnerships by using the concept of *vā* to engage meaningfully with Pasifika. Schools need connect with Pasifika parents and work together to focus on student learning. If schools make these strong connections, then they could “initiate links, respond to, and recognise strengths within the diverse families of their students” (Alton-Lee et al., 2003, p. 40). However [Nash,2000] identifies that “many Pacific families lack the specific forms of cultural capital required to use the school successfully” (p.80) Educators need to be cognisant that some Pasifika families have a different cultural understanding of education. Therefore, educators need to develop ways to help Pasifika understand schools in Aotearoa.

These different cultural understandings of learning and education was illuminated in Jones’ (1986) study of Pasifika girls in a predominantly *Pālagi* (European) school. In her study, Pasifika had a different perception of the methods needed for acquiring knowledge. The Pasifika girls perceived if they were copying notes that the teacher gave them, then they were learning. The girls were not necessarily understanding what they copied, and were therefore not learning (in a *Pālagi* sense). What became more evident in the study was that the Pasifika girls actively controlled the teachers and the lessons so that they could copy and therefore perpetuate what they thought was learning. If the lesson had no opportunity for students to copy notes, the Pasifika girls would misbehave. The study highlights that there was a misunderstanding about learning between the teacher and the Pasifika students because the knowledge was not being interpreted and understood by the Pasifika students. The teacher’s *Pālagi* worldview simply informed them that the girls were being naughty. The study highlights the vast difference in understanding how one should learn, by not only the Pasifika girls, but the *Pālagi* teachers.

By considering and examining the purpose of education, one might better understand how to improve educational outcomes for Pasifika.

The purpose of education- qualification, socialization, and subjectification.

Formal education should be a social and transformative experience where young people can gain a qualification. Gaining a qualification is one of three purposes of education according to Biesta (2009). Biesta (2009) explains that the concept of education is a layered where an individual acquires *qualification, socialization, and subjectification*. In Aotearoa schools, students gain skills, knowledge and dispositions that enable them to achieve the National Certificate in Educational Achievement (NCEA). Schools work hard to help students achieve a NCEA Level 2 qualification because it “gives people opportunities in terms of further education and employment contributing to better health outcomes and a better quality of life” (Ministry of Education, 2021). Since 2011, 18-year-olds have attained NCEA Level 2 or above as a qualification.

However, historically Pasifika rates of NCEA Level 2 attainment have been below European and Asian students. A decline in attainment of Pasifika NCEA level 2 was noted for 2019 and 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2021). Pasifika are most at risk of failing in schools compared to other demographics (in terms of gaining a qualification) and suggests that education is clearly not working for Pasifika (Porter-Samuels, 2013). If education for Pasifika is not being satisfied by the aspect of qualification, then perhaps the reasons are embedded in the second and third aspects which are *socialization* and *subjectification* respectively (Biesta, 2009). A consideration of how these two aspects is experienced by Pasifika will be explored in the next sub-sections.

Pasifika as a group in Aotearoa schools

Joining a school to become part of a group with shared values is the second purpose of education. This aspect is for *socialisation* and, according to Biesta (2009), is where students build their citizenship and

by belonging to a group being school, students receive character education. Furthermore, schools maintain and reinforce their values and beliefs through the daily classroom interactions in the classroom and through school-wide events like assemblies (Biesta, 2009).

One must question whose values and beliefs are shared in schools in the first instance to understand why Pasifika have low rates of achievement in our schools. The dominant culture in Aotearoa education is mainly European (*Pālagi*) and it is these values and beliefs that are upheld in Aotearoa schools (Nash, 2000). Moreover, these hegemonic values pervade the make-up of Aotearoa society and have belittled Pasifika since their very first interactions with Europeans (Hau'ofa, 1995). Christian missionaries who invaded the Pacific labelled "Oceanic cultures as savage, lascivious, and barbaric" and this viewpoint "has had a lasting and negative effect on people's views of their histories and traditions" (Hau'ofa, 1995, p. 151). Pasifika begin their educational journey at a disadvantage because their understanding of themselves as Peoples is diminished. Whilst schools do not intentionally set about to diminish Pasifika, they are structured using European (*Pālagi*) values can be at odds with Pasifika values and beliefs. In this way, schools can perpetrate and reinforce the negative rhetoric about Pasifika.

Pālagi values are reflected and maintained in Aotearoa's education and health communities. Pasifika and other minorities values are often ignored. Research conducted into providing culturally appropriate mental health to Samoan patients found that there are "conflicting values between Samoan culture and the dominant *Pālagi* (European) culture in New Zealand" which was a stress for the participants (Tamasese et al., 2005, p.304). The authors recommended given a more culturally inclusive approach, embracing the extended family to help the individual heal (Tamasese et al., 2005).

The impact of neoliberalism on Pasifika- the individual versus the collective

Understanding that the individual is part of the collective is paramount to understanding Pasifika culture. Being part of a collective as Pasifika, is counterintuitive to the Aotearoa education system which uses a neoliberal approach to structure and define itself. Neoliberalism developed as a concept in the 1970's and was embraced by Capitalist nations who wanted to participate in the global economy. Essentially, it was a way for those who held power to create policies and practices that would help them to become very rich. Neoliberalism fostered individual survival rather than national survival, and the terms of this survival were dictated by the market. Neoliberal thinking changed the focus of the government's relationship with the economy. More importantly, the government gave up responsibility for caring for their people (Davies and Bansel, 2007).

A neoliberal approach asks the individual to operate in a competitive market which isolates the individual from their community. This is foreign to Pasifika cultures where reciprocity and the common good was needed to survive (Hau'ofa, 1995). Adopting a neoliberal approach has been detrimental for Pasifika because a "combination of the financial worries low-income households experience and the added pressures associated with cultural collective obligations create added stresses for many" (Tamasese et al., 2005b, p. 307). Additionally, neoliberalism encourages a dependence on the system rather than an interdependence and reliance on each other. In this way Pasifika feel a sense of hopelessness and have therefore lose their dignity as Pasifika (Hau'ofa, 1995).

Neoliberal thinking has transformed education. Competition against other schools was nurtured, and student achievement became a way of the market (parents) choosing which schools were the best for their child. In essence, neoliberalism snatched away the "collective well-being" of a society and "withdraws value from the social good" (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 254). Therefore, neoliberalism

embraces a *Pālagi* way of being and excludes Pasifika values of wellbeing and connectedness of family and community.

Schools and their role in creating and maintaining inequity for Pasifika

Schools create and maintain social inequity through the “hidden curriculum” and therefore teachers must scrutinise how they teach and treat Pasifika. Teachers and school leaders in schools deliver their values and beliefs through their behaviour, what is said and unsaid, and how it is said (Biesta, 2009). In this way, the curriculum is hidden and can be more powerful than the overt curriculum studied in classrooms.

Schools can create inequity for Pasifika students when they are excluded from studying courses that might help them achieve University Entrance into university. Oftentimes, this exclusion happens because schools neglect to help Pasifika choose the right courses (Nash, 2000). Furthermore, inequity is maintained when labels are used to diminish Pasifika as underachievers. Schools describe Pasifika achievement as “underachievement, disengagement, ‘the bottom stream’, ‘achievement tail’, priority learners, ‘kids at risk’, ‘students lagging behind’ and achievement disparity” (Talení, 2018, p. 178). This example of structural inequity perpetuates that the cycle of Pasifika having low qualifications and being placed in low-income employment, will continue (Nash, 2000). This research also highlights that many schools overall ignore Pasifika.

Therefore, schools help to contribute to socio-economic inequity for Pasifika. Despite improvements in middle-class incomes for New Zealand born Pasifika, generally Pasifika feature negatively for all social indicators. Furthermore, Pasifika are ... “marginalised especially in areas of health and education and in situations of crisis” (Anae, 2010, p. 4). New Zealand’s education system is ranked (33rd out of 38) in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as the least equal, based on family background and socio-economic inequality (Carusi & Niwa, 2020).

Interrupting “the ingrained habits” in schools to improve outcomes for Pasifika

Successive governments have attempted to address this educational inequity for Pasifika by implementing policies asking educators to act. The latest iteration of the *Pasifika Education Plan* (New Zealand & Ministry of Education, 2020) is an example of this policy and asks educators to act by addressing five key system shifts. The document is comprehensive. However, it places a significant responsibility on educators and leaders to improve Pasifika academic achievement without considering societal restraints like poverty.

The task is daunting but something different must happen in schools to improve educational outcomes for Pasifika. School leaders and teachers in schools need to “interrupt the ingrained habits of life that hinder education, and to harness those that foster education” to help improve educational outcomes for Pasifika (Nash, 2000, p. 83). School leaders must examine the processes and systems that prevent Pasifika from achieving. Educators must also become more culturally inclusive so Pasifika are not excluded by structural inequities within the system (Nash, 2000).

Teachers need to carefully examine their own belief systems and understand that their perspective is shaped by their own worldview. In most cases, this world view has been shaped by the hegemony (Devine et al., 2012). A teacher makes interpretations based on their own assumptions and beliefs about Pasifika. Oftentimes, these interpretations are misinformed, and both the teacher and their Pasifika student can struggle to understand each other. There is a need for the teacher and student to *consciously understand* and be able to examine each other’s world view in the first instance. The teacher needs to *see* their Pasifika students and, moreover, *seek* to understand their students’ perspective. Educators who take the time to consciously understand their Pasifika students will be highly valued. (Devine et al., 2017).

Applying the concept of vā to teaching

Teachers who give value to and try to understand a Pasifika perspective will be developing and nurturing their relationships through vā. Every classroom has many vā, between teacher and student, peer and peer, student, and subject, and so on. (Reynolds, 2019a, p. 26).

A warm feeling needs to be established and nurtured with Pasifika, as “vā”, for education to take place (Devine et al., 2012). Whether a teacher, parent, or non-Pasifika, one would be “warmly welcomed when their respect for and contribution to the “vā” is perceived”. Furthermore, if an educator has “vā”, then great strides can be made into the “adaptive development in pedagogies, curriculum, administration and policy” (Devine et al., 2012, p. 62). *Pālagi* teachers can use this philosophical viewpoint of vā to improve and develop their relationships with Pasifika (Devine et al., 2012).

Teachers who show care and commitment towards Pasifika are building vā (Devine et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2018). Simple acts to build vā such as smiling or being friendly, show Pasifika that they are accepted and valued by the teacher. Having a sense of humour and being able to laugh with and at oneself is also a way to build and enhance relationships with Pasifika (Fa’alogo-Lilo & Cartwright, 2021). Pasifika like to give each other friendly “cheek” and this is considered to be an aspect of Pasifika culture (Campbell & Wilson, n.d.).

Educators need to acknowledge that Pasifika hold a different world perspective in the first instance to then take the next steps into developing meaningful relationships with Pasifika. Teachers need to respectfully accept this different perspective so that they can “reassure the student” ...that... “stepping into a world they do not know...they will survive engagement” (Devine et al., 2017, p. 474). The teacher, by accepting a Pasifika viewpoint for relationships, understands the importance of establishing and maintaining trust in the classroom and school. Therefore, Pasifika will be more likely to trust the teacher to educate in those spaces. A Pasifika understanding of relationships further suggests that “if one views

all reciprocal relationships with others as sacred, then the relationship will be more valued and nurtured more closely” (Anae, 2010, p. 13).

Teu le vā to improve teaching for Pasifika.

Teachers need to transfer this philosophical viewpoint of relationships, which is *vā*, into skills and actions which can promote the harmony and closeness that Pasifika need (Reynolds, 2018). The way a teacher communicates through body language, what they say and when they say it displays a teacher’s values and beliefs. Pasifika students watch carefully to see if they can trust a teacher to build *vā* before they make a commitment to the relationship (Reynolds, 2018).

Teu le vā is a concept that promotes the actions a teacher can take to be committed to the Pasifika understanding of multi-dimensional relationships (Anae, 2010). To *teu le vā* means a teacher will make a commitment to “value, nurture, look after, and if necessary to tidy up the *vā*” if there has been damage to the relationship (Reynolds, 2018, p. 73). This means that the commitment to the relationships needs to come first and must not be tokenistic because the teacher understands that the relationship is sacred. If this happens, then the teacher actions can be long lasting and respectful for all concerned.

The careful actions to *teu le vā* can be made using words, body language, and thinking about the proximity to students. When a teacher works with Pasifika understanding *vā*, then they understand that to *teu le vā* means they are “purposeful in advancing the relationship forward” (Anae, 2010, p. 18).

Teachers who use humour to work with Pasifika display attributes to *teu le vā*. Teachers who *teu le vā* give the time and energy to maintain, repair and reconcile the relationship/s because “To not do this will incur the wrath of the gods, the keepers of *tapu*, and positive successful outcomes will not eventuate” (Anae, 2010, p. 18).

Improving outcomes for Pasifika

Pasifika value educators who develop and nurture relationships (Anae, 2010; Devine et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2018). Educators need to examine their conscious actions, delivered through the overt, and more importantly, the hidden curriculum, to show Pasifika students and their families the importance of relationships. It is essential that the daily interactions and interpretations of the messages by both educator and student be understood mutually (Biesta, 2007).

Equally, teachers must have sound pedagogical practice and high expectations to show care and commitment for Pasifika (Alton-Lee et al., 2003). Teacher expectations have a profound effect on Pasifika students' academic achievement. Research over the last two decades has revealed that mainstream teachers in Aotearoa have "inappropriately low expectations for, make inappropriate assessments of, and/or provide lower levels of praise" for Pasifika (Alton-Lee et al., 2003, p. 5). Even when teachers are focussing on achievement, low expectations of Pasifika become a barrier to high achievement. The term *deficit theorizing* helps to explain the assumptions, and ideas that teachers bring to the classroom about cultural differences (Bishop et al., 2014). These assumptions and beliefs help to form low expectations of Pasifika student achievement. Teachers who have higher expectations, supported by strong pedagogical approaches, leads to greater engagement by students and higher achievement (Alton-Lee et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2014; Boyd, 2008).

Adopting a Pasifika perspective helps teachers and schools understand that some hegemonic practices can prevent and hinder relationships with *vā*. Creating seating plans, yelling across a classroom at students and "not smiling until Christmas" are all ways that demonstrate that the teacher has power. Teachers and schools who control and maintain power in this way will be damaging the *vā* (Bishop et al., 2014; Reynolds, 2018). Teachers who can share power and adopt "cultural norms of *whanaungatanga*, *awhina* and *tuakana/teina*" support students "not only in strong cultural identity and social

development but also in their achievement” (Alton-Lee et al., 2003, p. 30). These Māori values are very similar to those values underlying *vā* and if teachers were to embrace *teu le vā* to work with Pasifika, educational outcomes can improve.

The very nature of *teu le vā* may expose habitual and historical ways that the hegemony has created and maintained power (Reynolds, 2018). Schools need to have the courage to examine and challenge their values and beliefs delivered in the “hidden curriculum” (Biesta, 2009). This is most important if schools want to improve educational outcomes for Pasifika.

An examination of the third and, most important, aspect of education according to Biesta (2009) will now be considered to provide a framework by which schools can transform education for Pasifika.

Subjectification- The “proper” interest of education

Education should help Pasifika grow into themselves without being influenced by others. Helping Pasifika students explore their own thinking and identity is the third purpose of education. This aspect is *subjectification* which Biesta (2009) states is the “proper interest of education” (p 357) “...where education should provide a student with a “way of being(s) in which the individual is not simply a specimen of a more encompassing order” (Biesta, 2009, p. 356).

Subjectification relates to Kant’s (1982) philosophy where a link between education and human freedom is created (as cited in Biesta, 2009). Kant (1982) believed that students should be able to choose who they are and explore their own thinking through education. This has become a modern philosophy of education and schools embrace this rhetoric. However, there are some challenges when adopting this philosophy which Biesta (2009) wants educators to consider.

One of the challenges that educators face in adopting this philosophy is that *they* select the knowledge to deliver to their students. In the process of the educator choosing the knowledge, the student is not

truly able to explore their own thinking and ponder their uniqueness in the world (Biesta, 2009). Biesta (2009) also highlights to educators that, “through the lens of socialization” they are... “unable to grasp the uniqueness of each human being” (p. 358) because they are collectivising a group of students as a school. If the school is large, there are many groups and ways of collectivising, which makes relationships emphasising the uniqueness of each individual within the collective more difficult.

Educators need to be interested in *strong education* which is about “intervening, steering and changing” educational practice based on evidence (Biesta, 2009, p. 361). Through the process of *praxis*, where research informs practice, an intervention of some kind can be used to uphold or come close to allowing students to explore their uniqueness.

In finding an intervention, Giroux (2018) calls for educators to be imaginative and enabling in their solutions and to develop a language of possibility in their practice. Educators must use their power and influence to create justice, equality, and freedom (Giroux, 2018). The power that a teacher has in the classroom, through their interactions with students to affect change, can be used to liberate. Educators can help their students imagine a world of possibilities which they might not be familiar with. By doing this, students and teacher can “actively transform knowledge rather than simply consume it” (Giroux, 2018, p. 5). This means that educators must *know* why they are teaching/leading in a certain way and why their interactions are crucial in their practice of critical pedagogy. School leaders have a part in this process by creating opportunities for their teachers to further their capacity and capability to be critical agents for change. Hence a school can be transformational and affect the wider community (Giroux, 2018).

Applying Biesta’s (2009) philosophy, educators should intervene with moral purpose, using evidence to help Pasifika explore who they are and reduce educational disparities for Pasifika. Hattie (2009) states that the easiest way to reduce educational disparities is by helping teachers to examine their practice

(as cited in Bishop et al., 2004). By asking teachers to take an agentic position and theorize about their practice, Bishop (2004) suggests that teachers can improve educational outcomes. Furthermore, teachers should use inquiry and reflective practice to think about their everyday pedagogical practice to be culturally responsive to their students (Alton-Lee et al., 2003).

Reflecting about practice is helpful but the interactions that take place between a teacher and their Pasifika student/s needs to be closely examined as well. In every interaction in the classroom, a student is interpreting and trying to make sense of what they are being taught by the teacher and at the same time, a teacher is interpreting and trying to make sense of what the student is communicating to them (Biesta, 2007). It is “only through processes of *mutual* interpretation that education is possible” (Biesta, 2007, p. 8). Jones’ (1986) research highlighted a difference in an understanding of learning for both Pasifika and *Pālagi*. In this instance, *mutual* interpretation did not happen and therefore education for the Pasifika girls was not possible.

Educators require support, which can be through professional learning, to work successfully with Pasifika. Dewey (1911) suggests that when educators know about something, they can “gain better control over their actions” (as cited in Biesta, 2007, p. 11). More importantly, the examination of teacher practice will allow educators to *know* and control, or better still, change their actions in the classroom (Bruce Ferguson et al., 2008).

Educators need to be taught and embrace the concept of *vā*, adopted from the Pasifika world, to disturb and challenge the default *Pālagi* (European) concepts of classroom and school interactions (Reynolds, 2019). The way that teachers access professional learning to *teu le vā* is important because it must be structured. Reynolds cites the work of Aronson and Laughter (2016) who use the term culturally relevant education (CRE) to describe the two strands of teacher education needed for teacher professional development. One strand should teach culturally responsive *teaching* (CRT) which asks

teachers to examine their professional cultural competence and practice. The other strand is culturally responsive *pedagogy* (CRP), which asks teachers to examine their attitudes, beliefs, and values. These two aspects of teacher education must happen simultaneously for teachers to improve their interactions with their students.

Teachers must continually examine their professional competence and practice (CRT) to support Pasifika in the classroom. Some teachers have mistakenly adopted an attitude that the concept of *whanaungatanga* in getting to know students, was enough for students to be educated (Bishop et al., 2014). Teachers must have sound pedagogical practice as well. Content needs to be delivered within a culturally responsive and relational context for students to be educated (Alton-Lee et al., 2003; Hogg, 2015). Additionally, *vā*lid assessment is needed to support Pasifika in education (Alton-Lee et al., 2003).

Teachers can be supported to improve their interactions with Pasifika by having an observer evaluate the classroom dynamic. Specifically, the observer would be looking for interactions between teacher and the student (Alton-Lee et al, 2003). This observation could be used to examine the teacher's interactions in their endeavour to *teu le vā*. Furthermore, a learning community to support teachers "is key to positive academic outcomes alongside the teacher's pedagogical approaches (Alton-Lee et al., 2003, p.4). Adopting a Freirean philosophy suggests that Pasifika know what works for them and can lead the way.

Additionally, learning for teachers should include Pasifika student and family voice (Reynolds, 2019). Alongside a professional learning community supported by observation, teachers can trouble-shoot and practice balancing *vā* in the classroom and/or school environment by asking Pasifika. Teachers could "stand back a little from the learning and talk less" to truly listen to the needs of their Pasifika students (Boyd, 2008, p. 2). Understanding *vā* gives agency to the teacher because they would be able to view

their relationships with their students and families through a Pasifika lens to work on building positive relationships (Reynolds, 2019). This approach promotes a Pasifika way of learning.

Therefore, providers of the professional learning also need to understand and know how to *teu le vā* in *Pālagi* and Māori spaces for the learning to be authentic and meaningful to teachers (Anae, 2010). By developing new understanding of cultural constructs, teachers can work with students and families to facilitate transformative change for Pasifika.

Alongside culturally responsive teaching (CRT), teachers need to also examine their culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Education is not just a technical discipline, it also involves value judgements and, therefore, teacher values must be scrutinized (Biesta, 2007). Education is a *critical pedagogy* that is “a moral and political practice” (Giroux, 2018, p. 1). Teachers who understand this concept would know that to grow in competence, they need to continually examine their morals, beliefs, and existing attitudes (Bishop et al., 2014; Devine et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2018). Teachers need to practice their critical pedagogy to improve outcomes for their Pasifika students.

Giroux (2018) demands that educators look at the systems and processes that hinder students’ abilities to be who they can or want to be. Educators need to be “discerning and attentive to those places and protocols in which social agency has been denied or produced” (Giroux, 2018, p. 1). Furthermore, Giroux (2018) also identifies schools as “sites of struggle” and asks educators to “connect teaching to the promise of self and social change” (p. 2). Consequently, educators can investigate systems and processes to improve educational outcomes for Pasifika.

Educational outcomes for Pasifika can improve if educators are taught to *teu le vā*. Consequently, educators can help Pasifika navigate the *Pālagi* world. Schools can learn from Pasifika who have become adept at moving between the *Pālagi* and Pasifika worlds with different value systems. Research into Pasifika migrants with children born in New Zealand found that “these participants were able to weave

within and between multiple cultures with relative ease”; to walk the edges of different cultures (Tupuola, 2004, p. 88). Pasifika who can move between a Pasifika culture and a culture derived from Europe would therefore be “edge-walkers”, “being able to negotiate fluently between various *vā* through forms of edge-walking” (Reynolds, 2019a, p. 78). This way of adapting to different environments and cultures highlights the resilience of Pasifika and promotes edge-walking as a healthy way to survive in a postmodern world (Tupuola, 2004).

Teachers can be trained to become edge-walkers to help Pasifika navigate the *Pālagi* world of education. By viewing relationships through a lens of *vā*, teachers would see that the edge is fluid depending on the circumstance and “involves the recognition of the state of relationships across edges as affecting the way negotiation is performed” (Reynolds, 2019, p.36). When edge-walking, teachers firstly recognise that they are in a joint relationship with their student/s and *vā* would be recognised by both sides. Any decision that needed to be made in a predominantly *Pālagi* classroom and/or school would keep the *vā* intact and would be mutually understood by both sides (Reynolds, 2019).

Educators have the power to control what happens in their classrooms and schools. Their decisions and interventions need to be responsive to the moral and political struggles within schools. Educators have this responsibility, not only to the communities that they serve but to the students themselves (Freire, 1968). Freire (1968) wants educators to be “organized around a set of social experiences and ethical considerations ... where students can rethink the boundaries” (pg. 4). Allowing students to explore their identities through a culture of questioning that will help students to realise their possibilities, gives students agency. Students can then participate in and determine their own knowledge. Consequently, educators can intervene and help students to find socially responsible ways to challenge and change the world that they live in (Freire,1968).

Literature review conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the hegemonic restraints on Pasifika achievement in schools, specifically the effects of neoliberalism on education. Understanding the Pasifika world and investigating educational aspirations for these students and their families, illuminates the deep values and aspects of their culture that need to be embraced by teachers and schools.

A key “way of being” emerges that can be taught to teachers to help them understand relationships for Pasifika. To *teu le vā* asks teachers to foster and look after the relationship/s and suggests skills and attributes that a teacher can learn to help them practice *teu le vā*. Professional learning to support teachers to examine their values, assumptions, and beliefs to be able to develop skills to *teu le vā* will be needed. This must be done respectfully, with *vā* in mind.

Students and their families also need to join educators to become critical agents of change. Schools can *teu le vā* with their Pasifika community to help break down hegemonic restraints. Working together as a community can help to challenge and change the current reality for Pasifika in Aotearoa.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides the reasoning behind why I took phenomenology as my epistemological position because it suits the aim and questions of this study. I have gathered qualitative data provided by a focus group and then individual semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, open analysis to code the data was used. The final part of this chapter leads to an examination of reliability, validity, and ethical issues.

Research methodology

This study uses phenomenology as the epistemological position because it provides a paradigm in which to ground my research questions and methods. Biesta, Allan, and Edwards (2011) discuss the use of educational research to make things ‘plausible’ in our world and in doing so add a dimension or layer to our understanding so that we, “...make the strange familiar” (p.231). Educational research can be described using the metaphor of a tapestry where educators can identify threads in a cloth. By doing this, educators can ask: Why look at this thread in the first place? What makes this thread so important? (Biesta, Allan, and Edwards, 2011). This has led me to firstly consider why my research objective is important and worth exploring and secondly to consider which paradigm would provide the most robust philosophical grounding for this inquiry.

At the core of my research is a desire to listen to the voices that can speak for Pasifika and in particular the pressures in their lives. By understanding these pressures and more importantly the skills and attributes teachers have that work effectively with Pasifika, this research might illuminate how schools can make changes to improve educational outcomes for Pasifika. Listening carefully to what Pasifika have to say has caused me to examine closely and change my epistemological position several times. It

is important that I find a paradigm which best fits the objectives and philosophical approach of this study.

At the beginning of my research, I chose pragmatism as a philosophy. Morgan (2020) justifies pragmatism as a philosophy because our feelings are inextricably intertwined in the process of research. This leads to the researcher interpreting an action which creates a cycle from beliefs to actions to consequences. I initially thought that because I was a Pasifika researcher and the research participants were also Pasifika, we could work together to construct our belief and form an action. Further, pragmatism as a paradigm has a strong connection to an agenda for social justice and therefore seemed to be the paradigm most aligned to my study (Morgan, 2020). However, adopting pragmatism as a paradigm would have focused on the action. I need to be focused on listening carefully to the voices of the participants. Oftentimes in the rush to find a solution to a perceived problem, one forgets to listen. Consequently, a phenomenological paradigm has become more appropriate for addressing the aims and questions of my research. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), this paradigm is “based on the view that our knowledge of the world is noted in our immediate experiences” (p.300) and capturing the experiences of the adults in my study is the first step to understanding what attributes and skills work for Pasifika in schools. This paradigm is also suited to small scale research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

Additionally, phenomenology allows me to “explore the unique meanings of any human experience” (Given, 2008, p. 2) respecting that there are multiple realities that exist for the people in my study depending on their feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and values. This is most important as I reflect on the empirical data collected from the interviews before I describe, understand, and interpret these experiences as a researcher (Given,2008).

Phenomenological reflection about the empirical data requires a sensitive understanding so that assumptions that could be implicit are uncovered. In the construction of the knowledge, as a researcher I need to put aside my own beliefs and values. This has been a constant struggle throughout, but a phenomenological stance also brings about other tensions.

Choosing and then shaping the ideas or themes that come from the empirical data into words can be conflicting for a phenomenologist. Firstly, deciding what ideas or themes are important asks the phenomenologist to test whether it is their own idea or the participants. Secondly, choosing the words to express the ideas from the research can reduce the living moment created in the interviews and therefore limit the findings. Throughout the whole process of the research, a phenomenological attitude keeps the researcher reflectively attentive (Given, 2008). This continual reflection suits this study because it helps to capture as much as possible, an authentic Pasifika voice.

The phenomenological researcher needs to immerse themselves in the data so that they can relive the moment the data was captured. Recording and transcribing the interviews has allowed me to understand (as much as possible) the ideas expressed by the participants. This is an important part of the process for a phenomenologist because they are “interested in recovering the living moment of the now—even before we put language to it or describe it in words” (Given, 2008).

A phenomenological approach requires careful attention by the researcher when sifting for important themes or ideas that come from the empirical data. The technical term for looking for the essence in the data is *reduction*. This research has used *hermeneutic reduction* where I have tried to stay open to ideas presented in the data while reducing the living interviews to themes (Given, 2008). This openness and continual reflection are a constant challenge for the phenomenological researcher because the ideas are chosen and interpreted by the researcher themselves. The phenomenologist also chooses the words

when communicating the ideas in the data and must constantly question whether the intent in the writing gives an accurate portrayal communicated in the interviews (Given, 2008).

This tension can be eased in a phenomenological inquiry if the researcher uses empirical and/or reflective methods to interpret the data. In this research I have used both methods to check (as much as possible) that I have captured and interpreted the essence of each interview accurately. The constant struggle that a phenomenological approach requires is captured by Edmund Husserl, considered to be the founder of phenomenology. He emphasised that researchers need to look at what lies underneath what is being said and to liberate themselves from the usual ways of perceiving the world (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). To achieve this objective, I need to adopt research methods which allow participants to share openly their thoughts and beliefs. I decided to use open-ended and unstructured questions as an approach to seek the participants truth. As I move through each step of the research process, I must constantly reflect, question, and check my own assumptions and beliefs as a phenomenological researcher.

Adopting a phenomenological approach requires the researcher to constantly wrestle with the truth, which is hard enough to achieve in qualitative research. The research methods adopted in this study have allowed participants to share openly their thoughts and beliefs about Pasifika in schools and tell *their* truth. And equally as a phenomenological researcher, I have understood the meanings of the participants in my research and interpreted their words carefully to seek what *I think is their* truth.

Research Methods

The overall objective of my study is to examine the aspirations of Pasifika people, hegemonic restraints on Pasifika education, and the ways in which these two elements interact. The nature of the research question has led me to collect data from people that work closely with Pasifika in schools, specifically a

secondary school in New Zealand. These people, in my view, would understand and relate to Pasifika aspirations, but also understand the hegemonic restraints that education has on those aspirations.

This has led me to choose two different qualitative data collection methods. These were a focus group and four individual semi-structured interviews. Choosing these two forms of data collection methods allow me to access the opinions and experiences of a small group of participants.

Purposive sampling

For this study, I chose to use purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is defined by Newby (2014) as:

sampling which has a specific purpose aligned to the goals of the investigation. Purposive sampling is not probability based. Selection of a case study is purposive as is the case study of subjects with relevant characteristics. (p.668)

Purposive sampling is generally used by the phenomenological researcher to seek out participants with certain characteristics. The characteristics of my research questions and approach suggested that I engage with significant adults who work with Pasifika and their families in my school. These adults have a special relationship with Pasifika and help guide students through the schooling system. I have also developed a relationship of trust with each of these adults in my school. These relationships will hopefully help them feel comfortable about sharing their truth with me.

Consequently, I chose to interview four adults who I have identified using a pseudonym to protect their identities. *Fala* is the school's rugby and physical fitness coach. He is a Tongan male, grounded strongly in his heritage and who works closely with Pasifika students at the school. He is a coach, a mentor and tutor for the Pasifika culture group.

Leo is a *Pālagi* male youth worker who runs several programs before and after school to connect and mentor youth. He works with Pasifika and Māori students and has built strong connections with the families.

Maria and *Lani* are both female and work in the Sport's department. *Maria* is of Pasifika descent, the Head netball coach, Sports Director and "mum" to many of the Pasifika girls in the school. She will often go beyond her roles to house, feed and support the girls financially and emotionally while at the school.

Lani is Samoan and strongly grounded in her heritage. She coaches many sporting codes for the school, teaches Samoan dance to students in and out of school and is also a "mum" to many students. She also will go above her school roles to communicate and be a confidante for Pasifika students.

Reflection on the choice of methods

An important element of the research design of this study is gathering "the voice" or narratives of my participants who can speak on behalf of Pasifika students and their parents. To effectively answer the research questions, it is crucial that narratives are truthful and authentic so that knowledge gained is robust and reliable. Methodology based on the ideas of indigenous people should also consider the way in which these narratives are gathered (Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, 2008). The narratives in this study will not be gathered from indigenous people but highlight a consideration of how Pasifika might want to share their narratives.

Reynolds (2019) recommends using some form of dialogue to gather information because it respects Pasifika values of connection. Dialogue is "a helpful tool in making visible the perspectives of those who lack positional power in hegemonic relationships" (Reynolds, 2019, p. 37). With this consideration in mind, I have explored *talanoas* a method that would strengthen the data gathering for this study.

Suaalii-Sauni & Fulu-Aiolupotea (2014) advocate a Pacific research method called *talanoa* because it respects the cultural identity of Pasifika participants and can produce a more authentic set of responses. *Talanoa* is very similar to narrative interviews but is different in that *talanoa* requires cultural connectedness and that the researcher is a part of the process in the generation of knowledge (Vaiotele, 2006). *Talanoa* is about building relationships of trust so that knowledge is shared and co-constructed. At the beginning of the *talanoa* process, the shared understanding may be superficial because the relationships have not been built yet. As the process continues, the sharing of stories can become more intimate and truthful (Vaiotele, 2006). These considerations support *talanoa* as a method because of the adopted phenomenological position in this research. However, there are drawbacks to this method being used.

The researcher must be competent with the different rules that guide *talanoa*. The researcher should also understand that their research focus does not drive the interview, rather it is the hierarchy, age, gender, cultural rank, and community standing that will affect the conversation in *talanoa* (Vaiotele, 2006). *Talanoa* asks the researcher to demonstrate five key principles ranging from being humble and respectful to empathy and being hard working. These qualities need to be built over time so that the relationship becomes deeply respectful between the researcher and the participants (Vaiotele, 2006). Additionally, Fa'avāe et al., (2016) says that “to properly engage in *talanoa* might take years of learning. Therefore, in relation to this study I could not just go out as a researcher and “do” *talanoa* with my participants” (p. 143). *Talanoa* requires the researcher to have cultural competency which takes time to develop. As a researcher, I possess basic cultural competency, but I do not have the skills to do justice to the method of *talanoa*.

Hence, it became clear I could not use *talanoa* as a method because I do not possess the skills, knowledge or understanding of the process. I also rejected using *talanoa* as a method because I could not be involved in the interviews due to ethical reasons imposed by AUTEK. Understandably, the power

imbalance in my role of Deputy Principal needed to be addressed. This meant that I needed to remove myself from all interviews and have someone step in as interviewer. The interviewer also needed to have the relevant skills, expertise, and knowledge.

Talanoa suited my epistemological stance and so I did not want to totally discount *talanoa* as a method. Fa'avāe et al (2016) pose that we can “use elements and principles of *talanoa* in our research unevenly, in patches...without feeling inadequate...” (p. 147) and that we must write honestly about the difficulties and complexities we face during *talanoa*, instead of ignoring them in our writing. This led me to consider one of the principles of *talanoa* being *vā*, explained in the previous chapter. Thankfully my supervisor understands this concept and was able to gather the data with knowledge and support of my phenomenological position.

Gathering the data from the focus group using *vā* to guide the interview, helps set a protocol in terms of managing the group and the discussion that ensues. Bryman (2008) highlights that the benefit of the focus group over the interview is that it allows the facilitator to understand the “ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue as members of a group, rather than as individuals” (p.473). This interaction is important in my study as one participant sparks a response in another and helps the individual contribute to and be affirmed within the group discussion. The audio files certainly accounted for this type of interaction.

When designing focus groups, Newby (2014) says that consideration needs to be given to the makeup of the group, especially considering gender and social status. The focus group was made up of two males and two females and all work with youth as support staff. The makeup of the group was balanced in terms of gender, and all are equal in terms of professional status in the school. My thesis supervisor as the facilitator in the interviews, was respected by all participants because of her work in education. This

status helped to inspire relationships of trust and connectedness with the participants, demonstrated through the audio files.

The format of a semi-structured interview is one in which the interviewer has a list of specific topics to be covered, however the interviewee has a great deal of leeway on how to reply (Hoepfl, 1997). Bryman (2008) explains, “questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by the interviewees” (p.438). My supervisor asked more probing questions about the pressures of life on Pasifika students and then explored with the participants, some of the factors that supported Pasifika students in and out of school. The semi- structured interviews also provided a way to look for connections that were shared by the participants which were then solidified with the findings from the focus group.

The setting and conditions for the focus group to meet is an important consideration so that all members in the group feel comfortable and valued in their interactions (Hoepfl, 1997). The key principle of *vā* within the process of *talanoa*, needed to be observed. Therefore, my supervisor spent time on introductions and the provision of food and drink helped to cultivate *vā*. Each interview was recorded, and the group helped the supervisor set up for the interviews. The group connected through laughter and banter which built a sense of trust quickly. These actions by my supervisor and the group showed an understanding of *vā* and helped to generate honest qualitative data.

Data Analysis

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) suggest that there is no simple formula when taking qualitative data and making sense of it for research purposes. There are often several interpretations but the steps in moving from understanding to interpretation must be transparent and valid. There are several steps the researcher should follow to make sense of the data which include:

- i. Prepare and organise the data: transcribe and summary.
- ii. Describing and presenting the data
- iii. Analysing the data to make meaning. Sorting and categorising to look for patterns.
- iv. Interpreting the data
- v. Drawing conclusions
- vi. Reporting the findings
- vii. Ensuring accuracy, reliability, coherence, corroboration, and validity.

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, p. 644).

It is important that the researcher immerse themselves in the data and therefore adopt an inductive approach so that they follow... 'a bottom-up process moving from the data to explanation to theory' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, p. 645). The researcher should use the research questions to guide their analysis which will always involve some sort of coding.

Using a phenomenological approach suggests that I listen carefully to the participants and where possible not become involved as I immerse myself in the interviews. Gibbs (2007) suggest that the researcher starts by transcribing and then reading the texts to get a sense of what is happening. I adopted this strategy by carefully transcribing each recording. After a while some themes started to become evident. At this stage I used coloured post it notes and a scrapbook to capture key phrases. I colour coded the phrases according to codes or "themes" which is a term used in phenomenological analysis (Gibbs,2007).

To check my assumptions and interpretations of the themes I had allocated to the words, I used Nvivo, which is software developed to help researchers analyse qualitative data (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). I uploaded the transcriptions to Nvivo and used the word cloud function to visually see the top 100 words

used by each participant and the focus group in the interviews. This is the first stage of coding which identifies *relevant* categories and is called *open coding*.

Newby (2014) suggests that triangulation of the data, where a claim is validated using at least two independent sources, is useful for reliability. In my data analysis, I used the data from both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group to strengthen my decision for codes. Using both Nvivo and paper coding, I was able to refine the categories for the analysis and presentation of my data. This is the second stage of coding which is called *axial coding*. Finally, I checked my research questions and topics in my literature review to satisfy the last stage of coding called *selective coding* where all categories need to tie together to tell the story of my research (Gibbs, 2007).

The codes were organised into three sections which will form the headings to report my findings:

1. Life for Pasifika
2. The *Pālagi* world
3. Teacher skills and attributes

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity will always be considerations for the researcher undertaking qualitative research (Cohen et al.,2017). The researcher is part of the process for information gathering and as such, needs to be as true to the data as they can be. Before conducting this research, I conducted a trial of the research which resulted in several changes to the methodology. Trialing or piloting an aspect of research allows the researcher to test out their methods and make crucial adjustments and modifications before the “real” piece of work begins. Piloting allows for the researcher to specifically look at the setting to see how the setting might impact on the conduct of the research (Lee, 2018).

As a result, I reviewed the participants in my study. I wanted to access people who work more closely with Pasifika and their families to be able to speak more authentically about the pressures on Pasifika. I also adjusted some of the questions used in the trial because they were repetitive and at times confusing for the participants. By trialing the research, I reduced some of the factors that might have contributed to reliability and validity.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the “dependability, consistency, and/or repeatability of a project's data collection, interpretation, and/or analysis” (*The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education - SAGE Research Methods*, n.d., p. 910). In quantitative research, more appropriate terms such as credibility or dependability can be used to describe reliability. This is because qualitative research does not have the uniformity which is more evident in quantitative research. Three cited indicators of credibility and dependability can be used as an alternative to reliability and will be considered regarding my research (*The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education - SAGE Research Methods*, n.d.). The first consideration is for methodological coherence which is “the appropriate and thorough collection, analysis, and interpretation of data” (*The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education - SAGE Research Methods*, n.d., p. 910).

This research has been conducted using only four participants. Their voices on behalf of Pasifika limits the reliability of the data. My study would have been more robust if I had interviewed more people. However, in terms of thoroughness, the data collected is for a small-scale master's study and in this sense is fit for purpose. The makeup of my participants was important as they all work closely with Pasifika students and their families. Their unique qualities were explained clearly from the outset of my

research because they are central to this study. This also includes myself as the researcher and the interviewer who is my supervisor. In this way, I have been transparent.

The use of semi structured interviews and a focus group interview using *vā* was appropriate for the phenomenological approach adopted for my study. Questions stemming from my research question were used to form the basis of the interviews and further questioning could seek clarification and understanding. This was important as the unique responses of the participants could lead me to the findings.

In terms of reliability, one needs to consider the extra questions asked in the interview. These may have been leading at times because the interviewer knows the nature of the research and is seeking certain answers based on preconceived ideas. Having an external interviewer conduct the interviews has hopefully reduced the risk of this influence as she is an expert in research and understands the impact on the data.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) warn that the researcher can unavoidably interpret the data with bias as they might over-select or under-represent information. The analysis and interpretation of the data required that I listen carefully to the voices to determine the nuances and themes that became evident. Delamont (2012) discusses the work of Russell Bishop who observed that as he conducted his research into Māori perspectives on education, he became aware that his sense making of knowledge was through a “colonial lens” and that his interpretation of the voice was not always authentic.

Similarly, I am aware that even though I am Tokelauan, I am first generation with a limited understanding of the customs and traditions. I am mindful of my own lens which may influence the interpretation of the data and in this way, am continuing to adhere to the phenomenological stance taken in this research.

I have used two methods as well as checkpoints to make sure that the interpretation of the data is reliable. By using paper and post-it to code, as well as the software application Nvivo, I can check the themes that emerged. I allocated parts of the transcript to the themes and strengthened the reliability of the data by triangulating key phrases from the interviews. A key theme emerged only if all participants from the individual interviews and focus group interview spoke about the code. I used checkpoints with the participants throughout this process to make sure that my interpretation was sound and robust. As a result, I changed the wording of some themes. This is the second check or consideration in terms of credibility and dependability where I have made sure to consult with my participants. This ensures that I try to remain objective and continue to pay attention to reliability issues as a reflective researcher.

Validity

Validity refers to the “soundness” of the research and the degree to which the research measures what it purports to measure. In qualitative research, validity is difficult to attain and attempts to display validity are often rejected. This is due to the very nature of qualitative research which is intuitive to subjective and interpretive work. To help ensure research is valid though, procedures need to be transparent, results need to be evident and the conclusions that are made are convincing. Qualitative researchers often use measurement to make sure there is internal and external validity (*The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education - SAGE Research Methods*, n.d.). I asked my participants to verify the data at certain stages of my analysis so that I could ensure what I understood was corroborated. This helped to ensure internal validity where the answers to the questions could be checked.

Qualitative researchers also want to check external validity which refers to the likelihood that the data can be transferred to other settings and shared. However, this idea has been reconceptualised by

qualitative researchers in a more psychological way by talking about *transferability*. This notion suggests that the research has a working hypothesis that can be applied to similar contexts. It also suggests that those who are using the research are best to decide if the research can be *transferred* to their context (*The SAGE Handbook for Research in Education - SAGE Research Methods*, n.d.). The notion of transferability is applicable to my research, particularly because it is in the field of education where schools can be very different. The concepts discovered through my research can be transferred and applied to schools for Pasifika.

Ethical Issues

Jenkins (2005) states that it is important for social science research to have ethical rigour so that all participants in the research are protected. Before I started this research, I made an application to the ethics committee at AUT.

Doing good and avoiding harm for all participants involved in educational research is at the core of guiding researchers when they consider doing research in New Zealand. Researchers need to build mutual relationships of respect with participants and the research should be conducted and reported objectively and without prejudice. In terms of the principles that relate to research participants, researchers need to consider wellbeing, informed consent, confidentiality, time, and a genuine openness with all participants in the study (New Zealand Association for Research in Education, 2010).

Before commencing the study, I gained ethics approval from the relevant committee at AUT. To address the ethical issues of informed consent and preservation of rights to anonymity in this study, I provided the four adult participants with information sheets outlining the details of the study and what their taking part would involve. In these documents the key elements of the research were outlined, including purpose; identification for the research; an agreement to participate; procedures; risks; benefits;

privacy; costs (time); and a statement that participation was voluntary. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study and were provided an opportunity to ask questions regarding the study. I obtained signed consent from those taking part and from the principal of the school. By providing participants with as much information as possible regarding the study, I reduced any possibility of deception and minimised the harm of the research.

Bishop (2012) raises the issue of power as a researcher and the responsibility to interpret what is being said accurately. As a female Deputy Principal, I am aware of the “power” I have in my position, especially within the Pasifika community and with the participants in my study. Despite the friendship that I had developed with the participants through our work together, the power imbalance needed to be addressed. AUTEK insisted that someone else conduct the interviews. Thankfully my supervisor, with an understanding of the concept of *vā*, stepped in to conduct the interviews on my behalf. It is fitting that Nesta is part of this research because she has been present from the beginning.

Bishop (2012) discusses the need for conscious participation as a researcher in the sense making processes. Meaning needs to be constructed with the participants and negotiated. Tripp (1983) also discusses the need for negotiation so that power is shared when making meaning. My supervisor used the concept of *vā* to guide the interviews, establishing a warm and friendly atmosphere so that sense making was co-constructed, balanced, and equitable.

Individuals in the study need to be protected from being exposed, especially if the data is sensitive (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). I talked to each participant about confidentiality because I was mindful that participant voices could be isolated if the information was shared. Identification of the participants would be relatively easy, and I was concerned the participants might be bullied or receive retribution within the Pasifika and/or school communities. I was surprised when all participants wanted their words to be shared and names recognised. There was a sense of pride in the fact they were

contributing to research and were helping to find ways to improve education for Pasifika. However, I have decided to use pseudonyms as a precaution, and I will also share the findings in a sensitive way which will protect the participants.

Both the individual and focus group interviews were conducted at my school in a small and private room over two days. Looking after the wellbeing of the participants was important. I made sure the interview times suited the members, including my supervisor. Food and coffee, juice and tea were provided as part of cultural etiquette. I also made sure that the information collected in the focus groups and semi-structured interviews have been made available to participants to review and change. All information that I have collected has been safely stored throughout the course of this study.

Conclusion: Research Methodology

This chapter has described the methodology and research methods that I have used in this research. I have provided a rationale for adopting phenomenology as my epistemological position. I have also justified a focus group and then individual semi-structured interviews as data collection methods and explained the reasons behind purposive sampling. A phenomenological approach has led me to use both empirical and reflective methods to code the themes captured in each interview. Finally, I have described the criteria I have used to judge reliability, validity and ethical considerations relating to the study. In the next chapter I will present the findings that this research methodology and data collection methods have provided.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings and provide a discussion from the semi-structured and focus group interviews that were carried out as described in the previous chapter. This chapter is divided into three sections which are the main themes or codes synthesized from the interviews. Each section represents a key theme which will be divided into subheadings, highlighting key findings and discussion linked to the literature. The sections are:

Section One: Life for Pasifika

Section Two: The *Pālagi* world

Section Three: Teacher skills and attributes

The participants have been allocated pseudonyms to protect identities. *Fala* is the school's rugby and physical fitness coach. He is a Tongan male, grounded strongly in his heritage and works closely with Pasifika students and families as a coach, a mentor and tutor for the Pasifika culture group. *Leo* is a Pālagi male youth worker who runs several programs before and after school to connect and mentor youth. He works with Pasifika and Māori students and has built strong connections with the families. *Maria* is a woman of Pasifika descent who is the Head netball coach, Sports Director, and "mum" to many of the Pasifika girls in the school. *Lani* is a female Samoan and strongly grounded in her heritage. She is a coach and teaches Samoan dance. *Nesta* a female Pālagi Professor working at AUT, is the interviewer and my supervisor. As explained in the previous chapter, Nesta conducted the interviews on my behalf to address the power imbalance in the interviews and at the insistence of AUTEK. Thankfully, Nesta has knowledge and understanding of *vā* in *talanoa* and could therefore satisfy the epistemological stance for my research. As a result, Nesta's voice is heard in the interviews and will be evident in my

findings and discussion. Nesta has a Samoan and Fijian son who has fostered her academic interest in Pasifika education, which also justifies her voice in my research.

Section 1: Life for Pasifika

This section presents the findings regarding life for Pasifika and is divided into the following headings:

- a) Creating a Pasifika identity in a *Pālagi* world
- b) The pressures on Pasifika (Family, church, education, poverty, and hardship)
- c) Resilience and perseverance

a) Creating a Pasifika identity in a Pālagi world

Pasifika students find it difficult to know themselves and create their identity in a *Pālagi* world, which is represented for the purpose of this thesis, as school. Participants understood the complexity for Pasifika students trying to find their identity when they had to navigate two worlds: one being Pasifika and the other being *Pālagi* (European). Fala said that Pasifika are always *“jumping from world to world... but then some kids get lost in it. You don’t know who you are”*. Leo said *“they are very confused. Not academically- identity wise, because they have to be a particular way at school, particular way at home, particular way at church”*.

Pasifika have become adept at moving between worlds, adopting behaviours to complement each setting (Reynolds 2018). This is a real strength of Pasifika that needs to be celebrated. However, one wonders why Pasifika must adopt a different “way of being” at school in the first place. Schools should

be a place where individuals can grow into themselves without being negatively influenced by the hegemony (Biesta, 2009). This is obviously not always the case.

Furthermore, Pasifika are sometimes punished in schools for simply being Pasifika. This happens because students and teachers do not understand each other's worldview (Devine et al. 2012). The focus group discussed an example of Pasifika boys who were perceived as being loud and disruptive during one lunchtime at school. Duty teachers who came across the boys deemed the behaviour inappropriate and punished them. The boys were upset because they didn't understand why they were being punished. This incident highlighted the different "way of being" between Pasifika and Pālagi. With a Pasifika worldview held by the Pasifika boys, laughing loudly and joking around each other was seen as normal. However, in a predominantly Pālagi setting such as school, this behaviour was frowned upon. Fala commented that *"the 'cheehui' and stuff I'm sort of used to but I have to sort of tell them that 'hey, there's a place for that cuz, all goods'*, suggesting that by addressing the different worlds and different ways of being, Pasifika can better survive in the Pālagi world.

Leaders in schools need to intervene to create time and space for Pasifika to explore their identity and help them understand that they are moving between worlds with different value systems (Biesta, 2009). Likewise, teachers need to be given the time to explore their own worldview to better understand their students. This understanding of the Pasifika world is most important for students (Devine et al. 2012).

Learning their Pacific language, culture and histories helps Pasifika strengthen identity. Understanding your place in terms of genealogy was important to one participant, *"So I think it's an important factor knowing where you are from so you know where you're going. It gives them that sort of foundation"* (Leo). Leo suggests that if Pasifika learn about their heritage and connect to their Pacific Island and family, they will have a better sense of their Pacific world. Giving value given to this knowledge would help Pasifika become grounded in their Pacific world.

(Lani) "I don't want my kids to lose, you know, the language with the Samoan side..."

Language can also present barriers for students when used incorrectly or when older generations are dismissive about language acquisition.

(Leo) "And language....is a real taonga for them. But also, as a as a point of real pain as well. If it's used wrongly or not acknowledged..."

(Lani) "And they [grandparents] would speak back in Samoan...They would tease my kids or mock them and say ...how do you know how to speak?...._it's always gonna be a bit of negativity"

Learning the language and the traditional dances was also about understanding the values that underlie the culture.

(Lani) "I want them to also learn about their culture so that doesn't fade away in their life, but they have it there stamped in their hearts"

(Lani) "Just all the Samoan stuff that you should do to respect the people around you".

Pasifika need to be able to explore their unique identities and their place in Aotearoa. This requires teaching students the history of the Pacific so they can understand a Pacific perspective of the world. Schools need to allocate time for Pasifika to explore their identity so they can know who they are and where they come from (Hau'ofa, 1995). Additionally, schools need to find ways to teach the Pacific languages, because it helps to form and maintain strong Pacific identities and provide equitable outcomes (Hunter et al., 2016).

Belonging to a group which is Pasifika helps to create a sense of identity. Skin colour featured in the comments as a way of belonging as part of a Pasifika group.

(Fala) "The Pacific boys gravitate to me because I am a, you know, the same kind of them and stuff...Someone they can relate to, I think that's an important factor" (Fala).

(Maria) "When people initially look at me, they see a white woman... Then they understand that this is my background and I'm half FOB (Fresh off the Boat. This is a slang term that means recently arrived from a foreign country, and by implication naive or an outsider.) ...Then they think 'oh' and that sort of breaks down that barrier."

However, skin colour was also discussed by one participant as being a barrier to being accepted by Pasifika. Maria was *"treated a little bit differently because of my colour and my fairness"* by Pasifika and so finding identity as Pasifika was complicated. Whilst skin colour is an easy way to identify and then form a group, it can become a way to isolate and create barriers within Pasifika. The term doesn't account for the complexity of the genetic makeup of Pasifika in schools. Teachers and students need to understand that Pasifika as a term embraces multiple ethnicities and intra-ethnic nuances of diverse groupings and so there are many shades of Pasifika in our schools (Anae, 2010). Acknowledging and understanding the term "Pasifika" is how students can become more comfortable with their identities.

Furthermore, Pasifika find their identity and sense of "self" in a group because this is a Pasifika understanding and belief of how identity is acquired. Fala commented *"You know you go to an event and all of a sudden all the Poly kids are sitting together..."*. The formation of identity and "self" was discussed in one interview as being quite a different interpretation for Pasifika as opposed to a *Pālagi* perspective. The concept of the Pasifika "self" is formulated over time with the help of people in the life, so that "self" and identity comes *"by being open, the self is something you acquire over your lifetime....It's a totally different understanding of what a "self" might be"* (Nesta).

Another participant commented that Pasifika like team sports rather than individual sports because “...it fits in with Pacific family. It's not about the individual standing out...and more about supporting the team” (Fala). These findings support the concept of the Pasifika term *vā* where relationships are perceived as spatial and connected across spiritual, social and physical domains (Mila-Schaaf, 2006). Teachers must learn about the importance of *vā* to be able to navigate their relationships with Pasifika, as teachers and with a group of Pasifika (Reynolds, 2019).

Teachers need to understand *vā* and simultaneously build their skills to nurture *vā* to create a sense of belonging for Pasifika. Hence, teachers would *teu le vā* (which can roughly be translated as ‘caring for relationships’ where they would be working hard to nurture and advance their relationships with Pasifika (Anae, 2010). Teachers who practice *teu le vā* would be building relationships of connectedness with the Pasifika individual and/or group to help Pasifika feel a sense of belonging. Overwhelmingly all participants agreed that “Pacific kids they just...You know they long for belonging these days”(Lani).

Participants identified that building the Pasifika group needs to be done *with* the group rather than *to* the group. Fala said “Yeah, it's working with and developing them... it's growing with them, you know...And then once they're within it...They start to build [confidence]...They feel a sense of belonging”.

Fostering and nurturing relationships within the Pasifika group and with parents is important to make sure the group functions well. The participants discussed the need for family to support them as they worked with the Pasifika group. Maria talked about “amazing parents that will turn up with a tray of eggs and feed the kids...” after a netball training saying that “The island parents will do that” as if this was natural and she didn’t need to ask. Leo talked about Pasifika parents helping their boys join his breakfast training “If they’re not there, the van’s going... And so yeah, it is working with the parents” to make sure the boys are ready. Leo also suggests in this quote that the boys need to take individual responsibility for being a part of the group.

Fala also talks about a time where he took responsibility for his actions within his family group *“You just knew that you made a mistake, you better fix it up and take ownership of it.”* This suggests that Fala trusts the group to admit to a mistake and then is willing to work hard to make reparations so the group can function well again. Helping Pasifika become better as individuals helps the group function well. Fala spoke about this aspect in his role as a fitness coach.

(Fala) “I see coaching as an opportunity to build character in people and then to build better people in the community.”

Schools need to give Pasifika time to explore their identities. All participants discussed the need for Pasifika students to have time and freedom *“to go well, this is who I am, and this is what I do, and this is where I'm from, and these are the people that you know, this is my whakapapa”* (Leo). Applying Freire’s (1968) philosophy suggests that Pasifika need to participate in, and make sense of their own knowledge so they can challenge and change the world they live in.

Additionally, these findings support the concept of *vā* and *teu le vā* explained in the literature review. Teachers and school leaders need to learn how to build and foster relationships with, and for, Pasifika. Building these skills will help to ensure that Pasifika feel a sense of belonging and acceptance at school. Schools who can learn to *teu le vā* will support their Pasifika students’ identities and build strong relationships with Pasifika families (Reynolds, 2019).

b) The pressures on Pasifika (church, family, education, poverty, and hardship)

Life for Pasifika is difficult and consequently, Pasifika are expected to be tough.

(Fala) "...you know that Pacific environment. It's tough, you know. Like mums, tough, you know my uncles are tough."

There are certain pressures that Pasifika students are burdened with that affect school. Participants spoke about pressures from the family (whether intentional or not) that are felt by the individual. These pressures are the expectations that become values instilled from an early age.

Some of the pressures were "heavier", with emotional pressure from the family towards the individual.

(Lani) "They (Pasifika students) don't want to disappoint their families...Most of the time we hear them say they just want to make their parents proud...I must do this for my family."

This pressure on the Pasifika individual continued when there was misunderstanding and non-communication between generations. Oftentimes, there is no negotiation with the elder.

(Lani) "Cause parents will say no. I said no from the beginning. And I'm going to keep it with the no until the end...I couldn't talk, I had to shut my mouth, zip it, do what I was told to do. And that was hard."

(Lani) "I love my parents to bits...They are my life. But there are times I have to disagree with them what they do?"

(Lani) "Or they feel like they have failed...the generation nowadays. Have no voice at all."

These experiences suggest pressures for the Pasifika individual at times occur because the values that have been instilled from an early age are challenged. Pasifika feel a deep *commitment* and *sacrifice* for family, community, and society because *vā* has been instilled as a way of being from birth (Taleni, 2018).

When Pasifika walk in two worlds, and especially as a young person who is exploring their identity, the pressure to be an individual but remain Pasifika can be frustrating (Tamasese et al., 2005).

All participants commented that the Pasifika concept of family was different to a *Pālagi* perspective of family. Family was more significant in the lives of Pasifika and usually extended to grandparents, uncles and aunties who would usually live in the same household. Family in this sense would actively contribute to the upbringing of the children and help to shape them as individuals.

(Leo) "family and community is really key... I think there's more than just mum, dad, and kids with Pasifika or working class. There generally is more than one generation as well or cousins as well..."

(Maria) "Four generations in the home so trying to give my kids that openness..."

(Fala) "...you look out my backyard and they've dug a hole and made a place to cook a pig,...some of the other uncles are sitting by the fire and boiling some water and I was just like- Do we not have a stove? What is wrong with them? ...But that was what I grew up with"

The Samoan and Tongan participants in the group, who were strongly connected to their cultural upbringing, both commented on the differences in expectations put upon them by their families because of their gender and birth order in the family. Both described the pressures of being a girl or boy as hierarchical, which influenced the way that they behaved in, with and around their family members. It was evident that some relationships were more important and special to the participants. Fala describes the relationship with his older sister and the reverence that he gave when she was present in the room. Here, Fala is considering the sacred (*tapu*) connection or *vā* where a brother must ensure that their sister is safe and looked after (Tamasese et al., 2005).

(Fala) "...me being the oldest boy in my family I've always been used to being the person to go up ... the hierarchy is huge...the older sister...she's the head of the house. Even if you do have an older brother than her, she's still like the head...when she was there, I was just like quiet, just couldn't even speak."

(Fala) "...because I'm the oldest boy in the family so I gotta hold my own."

Lani describes the role that she has as an older sister and only female in the family to provide for her two younger brothers as well as her mother and father. In this example Lani highlights her responsibility and expectation as the only Samoan female in the household to look after and nurture the *vā* (*teu le vā*) with her parents and siblings (Tamasese et al., 2005).

(Lani) So I was expected to do everything and... there's high expectations...However, if my brothers were to jump in and say 'Mum, dad, I don't have anything' that would be ok. But for me it's different ... me being the only girl out of two boys.

Furthermore, both Jones (1991) and Tupuola (1998) noted that the presence of male students in a class inhibited discussion by female students. Whether or not the ethnicity of the male students was significant to the Pasifika female participants or not was unclear but the finding suggests that males in a classroom have an influence on Pasifika females (Bruce Ferguson et al., 2008).

These findings reveal that relationship dynamics impact Pasifika in terms of their responsibilities and expectations to each other and within their families. Pasifika cultures teach that the *vā* cannot be separated from family members because the family helps to create the individual. Brothers have a responsibility towards their sisters to look after and make sure their sister and her children are safe.

Sisters, in turn, have a responsibility towards the wider family to make sure needs are met (Tamasese et al., 2005).

The theme of hierarchy continues when the participants talk about the family dynamics and the hierarchy within the family. This was especially evident from the comments made by the Tongan and Samoan participants where knowing your place was a *vā*value that all Pasifika should understand and respect.

(Lani) "That's massive, like if they are following that Polynesian Pacific Island.... Family values. It's the hierarchy is huge, you know. You respect your parents..."

(Fala) "...And me being the oldest boy in my family I've always been used to being the person to go up... all my siblings... my young ones just sit there. And wait for me to talk..."

This perhaps explains why *"Lots of the Polynesian kids are quite shy. You tend to get like that in the Polynesian environment"* (Fala) because the behaviour is more about demonstrating the Pasifika values and principles that underly *vā* which are *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and *agamalu* (humility) (Talenī, 2018).

Pasifika have high aspirations and expectations for their children from education. Education was seen as a way for Pasifika to do better in life and was therefore important (Tamasese et al., 2005).

(Maria) "...they want to get through school or they want to leave school with Level 3... to excel in whatever code it might be and to finish school."

(Lani) "I think they prioritise their education a lot. ... education is important."

(Lani) "...my kids want to do something, make something of their life. They want to go to uni..."

The theme of competition between Pasifika families and the pressures to meet the demands of education featured large in these conversations. Pasifika families will make significant sacrifices to

ensure their children have the materials they perceive are needed to succeed in school (Nash, 2000). But these perceptions may be misplaced.

(Lani) "They've got all the gadgets they've got devices, they got... iPhones...but they come to school, no lunch. So, everything they've got is materialistic."

However, education was not always perceived by Pasifika as being as important as church or helping the family function. Pasifika still wanted their children to succeed in education but not to the detriment of attending church or helping the family. The perspectives are conflicting and add to the pressures on Pasifika students.

(Lani) "...they put church and what people thought – that was important to them. Not our education... (referring to the extra-curricular) They think it's just a waste of time. Waste of money."

(Maria) "...but don't see the point in more ..." (referring to the extra-curricular)

(Fala) "You've got the ones who push for education, push for sports and stuff... you've got these two realms... one that's like 'don't worry about school, you need to be home, to do the chores and stuff... And then you've got the other side that's like you've gotta work on your academics, don't worry about getting a job, you need to get here..."

The pressure for Pasifika to give money to the church was also highlighted. Gifting money to the church is a not only an indication of Pasifika rank and social place but it also shows an "an expression of reciprocity; they are used to show fulfilment of duty, feelings of love/generosity/empathy/respect and obedience" (Leslie, 1999 as cited in Tamasese et al.,2010, pg.5). The pressure to give enough money to

the church to avoid humiliation in front of the family can sometimes be to the detriment of the family itself (Tamasese et al., 2010).

(Lani) "They put church and what people thought – that was important to them. Not our education."

(Lani) "It's quite competitive too, in church. It's to compete who has the most, it's not about you going into church to pray to God, you know..."

These findings highlight the two worlds that Pasifika students must balance. Pasifika see religious spaces like church as an opportunity for the community to engage with their language and their cultural identities (Matika et al., 2021). Furthermore, church not only supports spiritual wellbeing, but gives an opportunity for Pasifika to connect and stay connected with family. Pasifika also want to support the pastor through giving gifts, service and food and will even give more importance to the church than to employment. Therefore, church can become a priority to the detriment of a Pasifika student studying at school (Faleolo, 2020).

Pasifika *vā*luing church over school and employment is difficult to understand from a *Pālagi* perspective. Academic achievement is most important to schools, who pay close attention to qualification data (New Zealand & Ministry of Education, 2020). Pasifika have a responsibility to church and family as well as maintaining academic achievement. Balancing the differing expectations from these two worlds helps one to understand the pressure that Pasifika children endure.

Participants commented on Pasifika needing help to understand education and more importantly the education system.

(Leo) "Pasifika families that I work with anyway, they don't understand the system-the education system because either they didn't go through [the system]"

Pasifika need *“help with the communication, the attendance, the pastoral care just staying on top of them (students)” (Maria).*

The biggest pressure discussed by all participants were the effects of poverty and hardship on Pasifika students and their families. This became an emotional topic for the participants, especially for the Tongan and Samoan group members. This reaction spoke to the reality of lived experience. References were made to work and/or lack of work and therefore lack of money to provide for the family. Lack of money impacted upon schooling and education in terms of lack of parental support. The inference here is that the parents want to support their children’s education but don’t always have the financial means to do that. Aotearoa’s education system is low-ranking in the OECD in terms of providing equity for Pasifika. Family background and poverty contribute to these statistics(Carusi & Niwa,2020).

(Lani) “I have found is that the kids are willing but trying to get the parents in behind them and not always being financially able to or get them there.... It's always about money.”

(Fala) “I think poverty is actually a huge part that... impacts on education. It’s huge.”

(Maria) “Poverty is massive because sport isn’t cheap...”

(Lani) “...that they would put work first. Before their own children, and that's what they prioritize- work and I get that because they're probably trying to provide for their family at home.”

(Leo)”...their parents are working multiple jobs, their parents aren’t home to pick them up most of the time early in the morning they’re getting themselves up...”

The participants spoke about other factors associated with poverty like inefficient or poor housing and poor health.

(Leo) "...And I think housing is one of the key things, low wages, like in New Zealand you shouldn't have to work three jobs to not even make ends meet."

(Leo) "Health of families as well, it's not just the student, it's the wider family. And sleeping the way that houses operate... a lot of these kids are asleep in lounges...or they have extra families in two bedrooms or a one-bedroom house."

The participants discussed the need for teachers to understand poverty and hardship for Pasifika. The Tongan and Samoan members of the group spoke about their own hardship and how that informed their understanding. Teachers who have had and share life experience of poverty and hardship can relate better to students who come from the same background (Reynolds, 2007). However, teachers do not need to come from poverty and hardship to show a commitment and care towards Pasifika students. Sharing aspects of a teacher's life to build *vā* can also develop relationships (Boyd, 2008).

(Fala) "...all those sorts of hardships with my siblings and my family.... I feel that's given me that sort of experience... Just understanding..."

(Lani) "...Has to be experienced...then you can start using it out there as well, but you have to go through some hardships to find it first."

Whilst the participants understood poverty, they were quick to find ways to resolve issues associated with poverty and so acted to give or gather resources where possible.

(Maria) "...we had food packages so my girls did a couple of rounds to families ...there's always a stash to make sure everyone's fed."

The students themselves were often providing their service and time to distribute resources to Pasifika families in need. Students are taking responsibility and acting against poverty to become part of the solution (Freire, 1968; Giroux, 2018). Whilst the girls in this example are learning about poverty and distributing resources to help provide equity, more needs to be done to teach Pasifika students how to *learn* their way out of poverty (Carusi & Niwa, 2020). This requires educators to work with Pasifika in finding solutions to help bring about social change (Giroux, 2018).

c) *Resilience and perseverance*

The participants discussed the power of laughter and having fun in the face of adversity. Again, this became emotional as the group talked about their past hardships but then very quickly someone would make a joke and the group were laughing again. Through the discourse the group reassured each other and bonded. The interviewer commented at one stage *"It's actually about breaking tension"* (Nesta) but what became more evident was the bond and connection that was being made in the group.

The attributes of resilience begin at an early age and the ability to laugh at yourself and with others was discussed as being Pasifika *"making fun of life. It is like a big effect of being"* (Nesta). Pasifika *vā*alue laughter and being able to give cheek to one another. Laughter and having a sense of humour is part of Pasifika culture and helps to build and foster relationships (Fa'alogo-Lilo & Cartwright, 2021).

(Fala) "...kids are just resilient regardless so you just learn to make things happen... I think, Polynesian...it's terrible because we laugh at anything. Like if someone falls over face plants. You know, I'm just in stitches. Get up and carry on."

Laughter, and the ability to persevere and keep going *despite* poverty and hardship was again discussed as being Pasifika. Participants discussed that hardship and poverty was a way to learn about life and could be beneficial.

(Lani) "Even if I don't get their support from family or my parents or my siblings, I'm gonna still strive to make it possible...keep that, damn, head of yours up high. Soldier on with a smile."

(Fala) "...Coming from poverty, it's a – for me it's like it teaches you you can either be the victim or you can learn from it."

(Leo) "...that's life says you've got to choose whether or not to be a victim."

(Fala) "Yeah, you can cry and then some stuff. There's a time for it..."

All participants discussed the importance in their lives of a significant adult that helped them when they were struggling in their life.

(Fala) "...And that was key, that chat, heaps of chats was probably the key to it all. Typical mum. And just with her guidance ...That's what my mum taught me."

(Leo) "So, like just being brutally honest with the kids again, I don't know what's going on here? But I'm willing to work with you to figure it out.... we have an answer we must work together. We just figure it out and it's giving empowerment."

(Fala) "...you are building self-esteem in a way... seen as building some resilience...._Yeah, because if you didn't oh man, you'll just be crying yourself in the corner every day..."

A key aspect identified was that this adult worked *with* them to solve the issue. This highlights the importance of *teu le vā* where teachers need to work hard to foster and advance the relationship with Pasifika so that it is ongoing and developing (Anae, 2010). Skills and attributes for teachers to *teu le vā* will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Section 2: The Pālagi world

Participants spoke clearly about two worlds that exist for their Pasifika students. All agreed that the predominant culture in a school is *Pālagi* “*this is a real pakeha/ pālagi institution*” (Leo)”, which means that schools reflect ideologies that are from *European origin* (Reynolds, 2019).

The *Pālagi* world describes the beliefs, attitudes, structures, and systems created by the hegemony (mainly European culture). These aspects of the culture are evident in our society and our schools and the conversations reveal how they prevent Pasifika from achieving their best at school.

Schools value achievement and place a lot of emphasis on student achievement or non-achievement. Leo commented that “*Pālagis want stats and achievements. Performance indicators, key competencies*” suggesting that Pasifika don’t necessarily see the importance of these aspects, but this is what is important to schools (and the hegemony). Biesta (2009) considers three aspects as the proper interest of education. The first interest is for *qualification*, evident in Leo’s comment. Schools often place so much emphasis on qualification that they do not consider the other two aspects outlined by Biesta (2009) which are *socialization* and *subjectification*.

Pasifika become lost in schools because their values and beliefs are not recognised and/or understood in the *Pālagi* school system. Often Pasifika are “*jumping from world to world*” (*Fala*) and in the process, lose their sense and value of identity. Fala in this statement explains how Pasifika have a “*way of being*”

at home that is Pasifika and then adopt a persona aligned to the hegemony when they enter school. In this way, Pasifika have to “jump” to make sense and act in each world. It became evident in the ensuing focus group discussion that the first step towards helping Pasifika understand the *Pālagi* world is to acknowledge that the *Pālagi* world exists and that it is foreign to Pasifika.

(Nesta) “It's an ancient European practice, you know, and I understand that. So, I therefore understand that for some of my students it's an alien practice.”

Schools create and reinforce hegemonic values and beliefs in the classroom and through structures and systems they use to operate (Biesta, 2009). Nesta expands by saying *“They [Pasifika] must know European forms of knowledge, because that's what counts in the world. And so, we teach them that we disparage all other forms of knowledge”*. As a result, when talking about her years as a teacher of Pasifika, she noticed *“my kids didn't want to go back to a Pasifika way of being. They wanted to achieve success within European terms”* hinting that her Pasifika students lost their Pasifika identity to adopt a *Pālagi* way of being so that they could be successful in education and *“that's where I think this acceptance of the structure as Pālagi can lead you”*. Giroux's philosophy (2018) supports that Pasifika lose their sense of identity by jumping worlds and in the process and over time compromise their very identity.

Furthermore, schools reinforce hegemonic values and beliefs through the daily interactions between Pasifika students and teachers in the classroom. Nesta speaks about the “positioning” of the teacher as a problem if teachers think about their Pasifika students as just a learner who needs to achieve.

(Nesta) “But it's that positioning as a learner I think, which is really important. When you're in that particular structure that you don't really challenge.”

Nesta implies that teachers need to challenge this perspective because Pasifika are more than a statistic or achievement standard and cannot thrive if they are exclusively thought about in this way.

Biesta (2009) asks educators to challenge their contribution to the *socialization* of education where teacher's attitudes and behaviours help to create and maintain social inequality. This is sometimes referred to as the "hidden curriculum", what is said and unsaid and how it is said. Biesta's work (2009) implies that teachers and leaders must reflect on their values and beliefs to check that systems, structures, and behaviours are supporting and not hindering Pasifika in schools.

Assisting Pasifika to navigate the *Pālagi* world, being school, was a priority for all participants. All participants decided "*to try and help/ assist students through that process*" (Leo) of education so that Pasifika could succeed in a world that was *Pālagi*. Leo understands his position as a youth worker in the *Pālagi* world of school. Teachers need to use their knowledge of the *Pālagi* world to help Pasifika navigate obstacles or challenges in education. Pasifika students and families value the participants in this study because they are aware of the part they play in helping their Pasifika students navigate education and furthermore, are happy to be used in this way.

Applying the research of Giroux (2018) to these findings suggests that educators can practice *critical pedagogy*, where they deliberately examine protocols, systems and structures that prevent Pasifika from achieving in schools. Identifying and then intervening to change how schools do things helps to connect education to social change for Pasifika. In this way, educators can use their power and influence to create justice and equality for Pasifika and hopefully the wider community (Giroux, 2018).

All participants saw their role in school as navigators for Pasifika. They were purposefully intervening and steering their Pasifika students through challenges and obstacles in education. In this way, all participants are demonstrating "strong education" which is the last and most important aspect Biesta

refers to as *subjectification*. This is the proper interest of education where educators help Pasifika thrive as a unique identity, despite the hegemony (Biesta, 2009).

Educators need to help Pasifika advance so that they have power in the hegemony. Nesta spoke about her job *“to get these people into these (educational) institutions...”* so that *“...the higher echelons of the education system can be affected by people who understand Pacific values”*. As a professor and lecturer, Nesta is doing all she can to advance Pasifika through education so that they can help others influence and therefore change and challenge some of the hegemonic structures that exist in schools. For Nesta *“education can be such a pathway”*.

Teachers who understand the Pasifika world can be navigators for Pasifika. They recognise the challenges and obstacles presented by the hegemony and can *edge-walk* between the two worlds to negotiate a path for their students (Reynolds, 2018). All participants are negotiating a pathway to higher education. At the same time, the participants are teaching their students to become edge-walkers as well. This gives their students the skills and knowledge to pass on, thereby helping to create better access to education for each student’s Pasifika community. Hence, teachers can help to bring about social change and influence society to help Pasifika advance (Giroux, 2018).

Leo also speaks about his responsibility as a youth worker (and navigator) in education as being *“beyond getting NCEA credits. It’s about creating...helping to give tools to young people”*. He suggests giving tools to young people, is not just about the individual, but the family and the community as well, *“To you know, go further than they did. To impact their communities in a positive way”* (Leo). Leo is very aware of the role he plays as a navigator in helping Pasifika advance. He too hopes his work will bring about some sort of social change. Teachers also need to be aware of the power they possess to liberate Pasifika (Giroux, 2018).

Leo discusses an incident involving some of his students as an example of helping Pasifika to navigate school. The boys were “*yahooing and, really, you know CHEEHOO,*” and being very loud but having fun at lunchtime. The way they were behaving could have been seen as acceptable if they were in a Pasifika environment. However, this was in school where the behaviour was interpreted as being disruptive (and even naughty) “*and teachers will just tell them off*”. As a result, the Pasifika boys became angry and disrespectful to the teachers because in their mind, they had done nothing wrong. Leo became a navigator for the boys and explained to them the expected behaviour in the *Pālagi* school so they could understand the teacher’s viewpoint and avoid punishment in the future. Pasifika need to have the tools to survive in the hegemony but, more importantly, they need *edge walkers* to help them navigate (Reynolds, 2018).

Edge walkers can help Pasifika survive in schools because they can intervene, especially when teachers misinterpret behaviour. Leo was able to talk to a Pasifika Deputy Principal who helped the teachers understand a Pasifika way of behaving. The teachers had misinterpreted the Pasifika boys’ behaviour as loud and rude, and the boys had not understood why they were being punished. In this case, both the teachers and students needed to examine their belief systems so that there was mutual interpretation and then understanding. As a result, the teachers and students could better understand each other’s worlds (Biesta, 2007).

Teachers need to be given the tools to help navigate the Pasifika world. Fala reported that Pasifika students would tell him “*teachers’ don’t get me. Teachers don’t know how to pronounce my name.*” Reynolds (2019) says that professional development in the form of *Culturally Relevant Education (CRE)* is needed for teachers so that they can better understand the Pasifika world. This type of professional development helps teachers to examine their attitudes values and beliefs as well as their cultural competence and practice (Reynolds, 2019).

Pasifika representation needs to be considered by governmental systems for Pasifika to advance. Leo states that *“the implicit stuff that happens to Pasifika and Māori within government,”* prevents Pasifika from excelling in education because decisions are being made within the hegemony without the voice of Pasifika being heard. Schools very rarely have representatives who genuinely understand and can speak for Pasifika because they are excluded by structural inequities within the system (Nash, 2000).

Leo suggests that we need *“the House of Representatives for a reason”* and that Pasifika need to be representative in government to help Pasifika.

Likewise, schools need to have Pasifika representation and actively look for more culturally inclusive ways to invite and engage with their voices (Tamasese et al. 2005). At this point Leo states that *“it’s a wider conversation”* but one that needs to be considered by schools. Leo further suggests that people in education (and indeed society) need to be *“careful with trying to push what you think they want? And all what you think is good for them”* because *Pālagi* don’t necessarily have the answers for Pasifika. Leo suggests that *“We’re all in the waka together, but they (Pasifika) are the ones that should be steering”* and that Pasifika should tell schools what they want, rather than letting others speak for Pasifika. Additionally, Leo says *“when it comes to Pasifika, how does that actually look like together?... you know, and them being the teachers and us being the learners”*. Here Leo implies that *Pālagi* in schools must let go of power and be willing to share with Pasifika (and Māori) in the decision making (Hogg, 2015; Reynolds, 2019b).

Leaders and teachers must have a mind shift where they are willing to listen to and share power with Pasifika. Leo challenges teachers to confront their racism as an individual within a school and avoid hiding behind the *“very broad terms of the structure of that being racist”*. He continues that if teachers say that schools *as a structure* is racist, then *“I believe we’re giving excuses to teachers within that system to continue to be racist.”* Teachers need to be honest and open in their examination of their

belief systems to be able to confront their racist attitudes. In doing this, they will be in a better position to work with Pasifika (Hogg, 2015; Reynolds, 2019b).

Section 3: Teacher skills and attributes

The participants highlighted skills and attributes a teacher working with Pasifika students should have to help their students be successful in school. These are organised using the headings below:

- a) High expectations, belief, and encouragement
- b) Love and care
- c) Building relationships of trust through action
- d) Open to learning
- e) Edge- walking (Helping Pasifika navigate two worlds)

a) *High expectations, belief, and encouragement*

Participants spoke about the high expectations they placed on their students while at school. This was in terms of academic performance; *“we want you to leave school with Level 3 or UE, or both or whatever it is and we want you to leave being the best” (Maria)*. Teachers having high expectations of Pasifika is crucial for Pasifika to perform well at school (Alton- Lee et al., 2003).

Apart from academic success, participants placed just as much importance on Pasifika students having high expectations of themselves, becoming a good person, and contributing to their community. Maria commented that the students *“have to meet me so I'm not going to keep giving. There has to be some ownership from you. ..Like so get in there!... being a better person is about being courageous enough”*. Maria also commented on the importance of legacy of those that had left school, *“our Island girls and our Pālagi girls appreciate what’s come before them...those girls who have helped us to get to*

where we are" so that there is some ownership taken by students to uphold standards and tradition. This example shows the importance of creating a family-like context where Pasifika values about family and community are transferred to school (Taleni, 2018). Additionally, the teacher has developed a culture in the community, using knowledge about the importance of family to support and advance their Pasifika groups in the school (Alton-Lee et al., 2003).

All participants spoke about communicating belief, but more importantly continuously looking for the potential in their Pasifika students.

(Leo) "It's also about seeing something valuable in the kid

Lani pointed out the importance of encouragement for Pasifika, which only needs to be a few words.

(Lani) "Words of encouragement when I was feeling my utmost worst. She was there to pick me up, even for just two or three words like 'you got this'..." when referring to a mentor in the school.

(Lani) "Just praise, encourage motivate them (Pasifika students) ...then you see a difference."

Teachers who show a relationship of care with high expectations will have a profound effect on Pasifika achievement (Alton-Lee et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2014; Boyd, 2008). Not only that, but teachers will also be supporting Pasifika wellbeing.

Fala spoke about his school not seeing potential in his abilities.

(Fala) "no one at school to guide me through what I was good at... but when I went to uni I found something that I liked... and then I realized 'oh, I'm actually good at science, biology, all that."

One wonders what pathway Fala may have found with some guidance and belief while at school.

Educators with low expectations of Pasifika become a barrier to high achievement for those students. In this example, Fala's teachers probably had made assumptions and had viewpoints that he would not be

able to do well in science and, therefore, did not see his potential (Alton-Lee et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2014; Boyd, 2008).

Leo recounted a moment where he asked some Pasifika boys if his teachers had told them they were “losers” or had made them feel like a “loser” and *“every single boy put their hand up. And we wonder why we’ve got a problem with young men in New Zealand. Sticks and stones, that’s a myth.”* The damage that a teacher’s assumptions and beliefs can have on students should not be underestimated. Moreover, the words teachers use to *deficit theorize* about students can have long lasting effects (Alton-Lee et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2014; Boyd, 2008). Both examples highlight the need for teachers to examine their belief systems through culturally relevant education (CRE) to disturb and challenge preconceived ideas about Pasifika (Reynolds, 2019).

Love and care

Demonstrating love and care to Pasifika is important. All participants discussed the need for Pasifika students and their families to experience love and care through teacher actions. The women participants discussed giving a hug and the male participants spoke about receiving a hug. These findings support the literature where teachers who demonstrate care for Pasifika help to improve engagement and academic outcomes (Alton-Lee et al., 2003a; Bishop et al., 2014; Boyd, 2008).

(Maria) “Even if I’m running past, it’ll be a quick kiss and cuddle ‘nice to see you’ and ra ra ra.”

(Lani) “I get hugs and kisses from all the students. The hug means everything. Love and affection like it’s a text. With a love heart.”

(Leo) “They will often refer to me quite affectionately as well. Like I love you Leo. They might do a group hug which....”

(Fala) "Like if you have a really Polynesian sort of upbringing, it's just all about just being real and loving... Lot of love... You can't teach love. Has to be experienced..."

During the interview with Fala, Nesta (the interviewer) asked if Pasifika students felt cared for outside of the sports field.

(Fala) "I'm not sure. From within the school, you mean? I'm unsure about that. I've never really asked..."

(Nesta) "It's not something you would ask."

The answer, in not being sure, suggests that actions to show love and care is not something educators in schools would naturally demonstrate, yet it is vitally important to Pasifika that educators do this. In this way, educators would *teu le vā* to ensure that the *vā* for Pasifika is continually nurtured (Anae, 2010; Reynolds, 2019b).

All participants spoke passionately about teachers needing to show their commitment to Pasifika by being "more" than just a teacher in the classroom.

(Leo) "That's really key. If teachers think that teaching is just turning up... and teaching... that's not teaching in my opinion... If it's just a job, then you're in the wrong profession... You do more regardless..."

Pasifika value teachers who have subject knowledge but of equal importance is the ability for teachers to form, maintain and nurture effective relationships (Alton-Lee et al., 2003a; Reynolds, 2018).

Building relationships of trust with Pasifika through action

All participants used the words *trust* and *honesty* to discuss how they work with Pasifika students and their families. It was evident in the responses that being truthful and setting very clear boundaries was important so students knew where they stood. Simultaneously, students needed to know the participants would be there for them.

(Fala) "Be honest so they know where they stand...it's natural and it's not fake and you're not overthinking it...it's just all about just being real and loving..."

(Maria) "...what they hear is what they get, there's no beating around the bush ...There's a line, don't cross it, but we are here for you, they know we are here for them 100% and they know who to talk to if they need that support in certain areas."

(Lani) "...we're being honest and that's how I would rather have my talks with my kids ... talk and be honest about it. Don't hide anything...I can't even say what I do... is from the heart."

Leo commented that building the relationships took hard work but that the relationship was reciprocal so that he takes a stance *"I don't know what's going on here? But I'm willing to work with you to figure it out... we have an answer we must work together"* which is *"giving empowerment...to get to that point where there's no barrier."* These findings show that the participants understand how to build relationships with Pasifika. They set clear expectations and boundaries and work with their students to negotiate problems that may arise. In the process, participants are demonstrating the skills for *teu le vā* and are not afraid to share their thoughts and feelings in the relationship (Boyd, 2008; Reynolds, 2018).

Engaging with Pasifika families featured in all interviews as being crucial.

(Maria) "...think to really support our students at school, in their education, their sporting, their emotional health, their mental health, you have to engage caregivers and parents as well."

(Maria) "Well I think one of the things that is one of our strengths is that we will engage with the parents."

Once again, participants spoke about the need to work hard to build relationships of trust with their Pasifika students' families. Persevering with Pasifika family to build trust and continuing to demonstrate trust through actions was a common theme. Leo spoke about one Pasifika parent who was challenging when trying to make contact and *"I worked to get in touch with one parent and they were working three jobs"* but never gave up despite the difficulty.

Lani spoke about gender difference when garnering trust from Pasifika parents *"...to get their mothers to trust me with their sons...parents to trust me with their daughters...ring me anytime...I'll keep you posted. I want to make sure I get that trust from the parents."*

All participants discussed creative methods that they have used to build relationships with Pasifika. Lani and Leo both talked about attending Pasifika church services to interact and build trust with families. Leo shared a little of his personal history with the families to build trust. All spoke about strategizing and in some cases, worked together as a team to work with the Pasifika families.

(Maria) "...we just talked about different ideas of approaching the mum ... Just having that support there to help her get the kids to school and help to show her mum that school has got more to offer than the classroom..."

(Leo) "...knowing my background, I think they go. Oh- OK. Yeah, I understand where you come from"

Building strong, meaningful home-school partnerships with Pasifika is vital for improving student outcomes. All participants were practising strong education when trying to intervene and create opportunities to engage with Pasifika families (Biesta, 2007; Giroux, 2018). Participants were once again practising *teu le vā* with Pasifika families so that they could help to navigate education for the students (Alton-Lee et al., 2003a; Nash, 2000).

Open to learning

Teachers need to have an inquiring, non-judgemental and open approach to learning about their Pasifika students. In this sense they are open and willing to learn about their students and in the process, themselves. This requires a conscious decision to open their mind and abandon preconceived ideas about Pasifika students and/or their families.

(Leo) "I just think it's trying to put your own baggage to one side, like the stuff that you're carrying, as much as you can... Just... looking at each kid as they come to you"

(Fala) "I'm very cautious of my thoughts about being judging."

Teachers need to consciously examine their worldview to try and understand Pasifika (Devine et al., 2017). "Open to learning" also means spending time and being present so that one can understand, listen to, and know about each student. Teachers understand *vā* and are practising the skills required to care for and nurture Pasifika students (Devine et al., 2017).

(Maria) "I have also learnt to stop and listen and to not keep pushing..."

(Fala) "Give time to the kids, just being with them sort of thing. Sometimes you just need to stop and say 'hey, how are you boys feeling? What's going on?' ...And half the time that's all they're wanting is just someone to listen to them."

(Nesta) "...think that's really important for teachers generally to see, not just for Pasifika... but to see beyond, there is a world these kids inhabit that is complex."

(Leo) "I think, try and see beyond that child and beyond the teacher-parent interviews."

Interestingly, the two *Pālagi* members identified a difference in what taking time and being present means for Pasifika when being "open to learning".

(Leo) "Pālagis want stats and achievements. Performance indicators, key competencies...generally when it comes to young people, taking them to McDonald's and hanging out at Maccas...is just as powerful"

The *Pālagi* members of the group also talked about being conscious of shifting from their *Pālagi* perspective of the world to appreciate and be open to learning from a Pasifika perspective.

(Leo) "...so let's say I want to understand things from a Pasifika point of view. So, I'm almost coming into a Pasifika structure. Of a cultural structure and one that I don't understand and had never operated in...Take it back to a Pasifika context..."

All teachers, but mostly *Pālagi* teachers (because they make up most of the workforce) need to be presented with and then understand the difference between Pasifika and *Pālagi* world views. While immersed in this process, teachers need to consciously examine and challenge their own beliefs. Presenting a philosophical viewpoint like *vā* and *teu le vā* can help teachers because they have a

framework to develop a cultural way of being that will support better relationships for Pasifika (Devine et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2019b).

Edge- walking: Helping Pasifika navigate two worlds

Educators require a set of skills is needed to help Pasifika navigate between worlds. All participants discussed listening and taking the time to listen as an attribute needed to work with Pasifika. Teachers need to listen deeply and be alert to what is said and unsaid by Pasifika students. In this way, teachers are practising the skills of *vā* to help Pasifika navigate their way through challenges at school (Devine et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2019).

(Maria) *“...it’s that art of listening...when the kids are talking you pick up things ...it’s just being aware and taking note of every little thing that you hear.”*

Taking the time to understand the difficulties for Pasifika families is also important. Maria talked about some families having difficulty getting to her trainings *“but just understand sometimes maybe the lack of support or the understanding about getting to trainings and what that looks like”* can be solved because she found a way *“to get the parents in behind them”*. Maria used another example where she was speaking about the demands of life for a Pasifika student. Maria explained that she listened deeply to the student’s situation *“...because she has other stuff on and keeping it in the back of my mind.* In these examples, Maria is adopting a Pasifika perspective to understand what may be going on for the Pasifika student and *“finding out what that is so you can put in the right support.”* Once again Maria is practicing the skills and attributes of *vā* to support Pasifika students (Devine et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2019).

Explicitly working with students and families to navigate between worlds also featured. Maria spoke about a situation where some of her Pasifika girls couldn’t be heard as they coached their team at a

netball training. Maria explains that she was “...taking them aside and coaching them”. Maria understood that to speak in front of a group in a loud and authoritative way was not culturally comfortable for the Pasifika girls, so she needed to coach them and teach them what to do. Leo spoke about a group of Pasifika boys who were “yahooining and, CHEEHOO[ing], and teachers will just tell them off. And that’s their way of expressing themselves.” This showed Leo’s awareness of the two worlds that his students operate in and the need for the Pasifika boys to learn about the different ways of behaving in each world, so they weren’t disciplined. Both participants are working with Pasifika to find a solution that feels comfortable, not only for the *Pālagi* world but the Pasifika world (Reynolds, 2019).

Coaching and teaching Pasifika students was a way for participants to help build resilience in students so that they could survive the *Pālagi* world. In this way, teachers are working with Pasifika students to help them imagine new ways of being in school (Giroux, 2018).

(Fala) “I see coaching as an opportunity to build character in people and then to build better people in the community so I just use it as my catalyst in a sense and then applying my views of how to be a good person...”

(Maria) “...when we talk about poverty with the kids I reckon that creates that sort of resilience and we’ve just got to teach them... it takes a person to go ‘you can either look at this, you can be a victim, or you can become your own hero.”

Persevering with Pasifika families to help their children stay engaged in school was important despite the difficulty and frustration at times. Maria referred to winning some battles and losing some battles in trying to get Pasifika parents to see the potential in their child.

(Maria) “Do they see what their child's capable of the, the brightness that they have and then do they not see where they are or are they just blind?”

Lani spoke in a general sense about a Pasifika mindset of some parents who were determined and steadfast in their goals for their child. This is despite the potential and/or the dreams and aspirations the Pasifika student might have.

(Lani) "They [Pasifika students] could be really, talented in music and the performing arts. But they can't do that. That's not allowed. That's a big no no. They have to study towards becoming the lawyers, the doctors."

(Lani) "...with some PI parents who think they know it all they say I'm working so that's none of your business. You can't come and talk to me about my child and I've come across a few parents like that."

Despite the challenges of this mindset, it was important to all participants that they “conduct some negotiation, for both staff and the kids” (Nesta) with the family in whatever way possible. Maria spoke about the importance of communication with Pasifika families and demonstrating a commitment to her students through action.

(Maria) And happy to get on the phone and ring the parents and go pick them up and do what is necessary to help them understand that I'm as committed as their kids and then they let them

(Maria) "Have that conversation with the mum 'can't get her to school? Okay, want me to come to your house?' And that night at 6:00 I'm at their house. So the difference of just making that little bit of effort"

These findings support teachers being able to “edge-walk” with Pasifika. This involves using the skills and attributes of *vā* to work with Pasifika. Teachers need to negotiate the different values, systems, and structures between the *Pālagi* world and the Pasifika world for their students (Reynolds, 2018). Maria became frustrated when “some of our teachers don't understand that our kids actually don't know how

to problem-solve. Maria knows that there are challenges in the Pasifika child's life and suggested that teachers need to be able to problem solve for themselves and "edge-walk' with the Pasifika child and family, rather than seek her out because she is Pasifika. She found it frustrating when teachers "*pass the buck...but just ask the freaking student yourself, or ring the parent! It's really simple!*". Every teacher who works with Pasifika has responsibility for edge-walking but must understand the skills and attributes of *vā* before they can do this. Teachers need culturally relevant education (CRE) to become edge-walkers. This will involve teachers examining their cultural competence and practice (CRT) as well as an examination of beliefs, attitudes and values through culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) (Reynolds, 2019).

Participants spoke about helping Pasifika navigate the *Pālagi* world in a collective sense where students, teachers and the family should work together. Maria spoke about the importance of involving the parents to communicate and actively "*helping them understand what this [education] space looks like*" because often Pasifika parents do not know and feel uncomfortable about asking about school matters. Maria added that information can be scaffolded and/or broken down so "*filtering what's important and what's not*" and then more importantly "*making that time to help them (Pasifika families) understand so that the kids can have their opportunity. That's my job.*" School leaders need to understand and practice *teu le vā* with Pasifika to help the school and community work together. This would involve helping to develop a culture of relational trust where Pasifika families can speak honestly with the school. School leaders could then be working meaningfully with the families to improve student outcomes (Talení, 2018).

CHAPTER FIVE: DRAWING ON SIGNIFICANT CONCLUSIONS TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS

This concluding chapter will provide an overview of the research study, draw significant conclusions, and make recommendations for possible actions in schools.

An overview of the research study

The overall objective of this research was to find out how schools can disrupt current practice to improve outcomes for Pasifika. Taking an appreciative stance, four people who work closely with Pasifika discussed the aspirations and values Pasifika have which challenge hegemonic assumptions. The following questions formed the basis for this study.

- a. What educational aspirations do our Pasifika students and families have?
- a. What are important Pasifika values held by Pasifika students?
- b. What aspects of Pasifika culture need to be embraced by a school?

Discussion of findings summary

This study and the literature have identified some significant knowledge and attributes that teachers need or can build upon to work successfully with Pasifika in schools. Below is a list of these characteristics in no specific order.

Teachers who work successfully with Pasifika:

1. Understand the different worlds that Pasifika move in so they can help their students navigate the education system and school. Pasifika have different values and expectations placed on them by the worlds of family, church, friends, and school. Teachers who live in and/or can immerse themselves in one or more of these Pasifika worlds can understand how to navigate for Pasifika because they understand the pressures these worlds put on their Pasifika students' lives.

2. Build close relationships with Pasifika families and actively nurture these relationships. All participants in this study spoke about building and maintaining relationships of trust with the Pasifika students and their families. They all spoke about the *actions* they would take to show their love, respect and value for their students and families. In this way, even though the participants did not know about the concept of *vā* or *teu le vā*, they all understood the “sacred nature of their relationship” with their Pasifika students and their families (Reynolds, 2019, p.3).
3. Are persistent in their hope that Pasifika will overcome challenges in and out of their schools. These teachers will persevere and look for creative ways that can advance Pasifika in their schools and believe that solutions can be created for Pasifika, with Pasifika. These teachers know and understand the pressures of poverty for Pasifika and are willing to find creative ways to alleviate poverty if needed.
4. Challenge the systems that prevent Pasifika from doing well in their schools and are deliberate about their interventions for Pasifika. The participants in this study, with their knowledge and understanding of their school, could negotiate and manipulate certain situations to help their Pasifika students and families make things work better for them at school.
5. Have a sense of humour and use their humour to work with Pasifika. Teachers need to be able to laugh at the world, and at themselves, to be able to work with Pasifika successfully.
6. Know the impact that a significant adult can have on a Pasifika student’s life by having high expectations and a sense of belief in them at school.
7. Work **with** Pasifika students rather than **to** them. These teachers know that they need to allow their Pasifika students to contribute to how they learn and want to learn in school.
8. Are *present* when listening to and understanding their Pasifika students. These teachers make the time and space to listen to and unpack if necessary what Pasifika students are telling them at school.

9. Value Pasifika culture and identity and where possible speaks the language. Teachers and school leaders who provide opportunities for Pasifika to learn their language and give space and time for Pasifika students to explore their Pasifika identity will work better with Pasifika.
10. Are open to learning and vulnerable to examining their own belief systems. This also includes teachers being open and willing to own up to mistakes in front of Pasifika.

The participants in this study *innately* had most of the above characteristics. In some cases, the participants had *experienced* the characteristics because they had been immersed in Pasifika worlds through the roles they held in and outside the school. Being able to challenge and change the systems that prevented Pasifika from doing well in schools was not always part of their role and their influence, but they were all aware and wanted some things to be changed in schools to help make life easier for Pasifika.

Recommendations and possible actions

Schools who choose to advance Pasifika need to disrupt current practice. This will require careful and respectful leadership of systems and processes and most importantly the people involved. The challenge ahead is not easy for schools because some leaders and teachers have no idea about Pasifika worlds or even that other worlds exist outside of their own. Most critically though, some teachers and leaders have assumptions and beliefs that are immediately and irreparably harmful to Pasifika. To navigate a way forward, three key recommendations have been identified and provide the headings in this next section.

a) Professional development for educators to understand the Pasifika world

Teachers and leaders in schools have guiding documents like *Tapasa* to help them understand the Pasifika world and in their quest to understand, must be able to have “The ability to reflect on the

beliefs and ideas that are held within ones' own culture..." to "...enable teachers to recognise their inbuilt assumptions" (Ministry of Education, 2018, p.7).

The findings and the literature have highlighted that Culturally Relevant education (CRE) can be used as a framework for professional learning to help teachers work better with Pasifika (Bishop et al., 2014; Devine et al., 2012; Reynolds, 2019b). This will involve teachers examining their cultural competence and practice (Culturally Responsive Teaching) while at the same time examining their beliefs, attitudes, and values through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) (Reynolds, 2019).

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) will help teachers to build excellent cultural teaching skills.

Teachers must build upon their skills as a teacher in the classroom. Establishing excellent relationships (*whanaungatanga*) exclusively is not enough to improve Pasifika outcomes (Bishop et al., 2014). An *observation* tool to evaluate and feedback on cultural teacher practice could be useful to highlight areas of teacher practice that need to be improved (Alton-Lee et al., 2003a; Bishop et al., 2014).

Understanding and skilfully using a range of assessment tools is also key to improving Pasifika success (Alton-Lee et al., 2003b).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) asks educators to have an inquiring, non-judgemental and open approach to learning about Pasifika. In their examination of their belief systems, teachers need to confront their racist attitudes so they will be in a better position to work with Pasifika (Hogg, 2015; Reynolds, 2019b). Teachers will then need to abandon preconceived ideas about Pasifika students and/or their families to understand that Pasifika walk in two worlds. (Biesta, 2020b; Devine et al., 2017; Reynolds, 2019b). Educators need to appreciate that the *Pālagi* world (for Pasifika) reinforces and maintains hegemonic values and beliefs, evident in the classroom and through the structures and systems of school (Biesta, 2009).

In delivering a framework like Culturally Relevant Education (CRE) to teachers, leaders need to provide space and time for teachers to reflect deeply about themselves because “knowing yourself is not only about identity and self-reflection it is to also understand ones’ own biases, prejudices and actions of privileging” (Ministry of Education, 2018). Asking teachers to reflect deeply on their own values and assumptions is to walk respectfully alongside them on their journey because for some, it can be painful and confronting.

b) Leaders and teachers with a “Pasifika heart”

To disrupt current practice, schools need to promote, retain, and recruit teachers and leaders with a Pasifika “heart” who can advocate and intervene to practice *critical pedagogy* (H. Giroux, 2018).

Educators who practice critical pedagogy will deliberately examine protocols, systems and structures that prevent Pasifika from achieving in schools and do something different to improve Pasifika student outcomes.

Schools need to give Pasifika time to explore their identities and make sense of their own knowledge so they can challenge and change the world they live in (Freire, 1968). This requires teaching students the history of the Pacific so they can understand a Pacific perspective of their world. Hence, students can know who they are and where they come from (Hau’ofa, 1995). Schools also need to find ways to teach the Pacific languages (Hunter et al., 2016).

Educators with a Pasifika “heart” will recognise that schools create and maintain the values and beliefs of the hegemony (Biesta, 2020a; Darder, 2014; H. Giroux, 2018). This understanding will help educators *teu le vā* so that they share power with Pasifika (and Māori) in the decision making (Hogg, 2015; Reynolds, 2019b) because *Pālagi* do not necessarily have the answers for Pasifika (Nash, 2000).

Additionally, educators would be working with Pasifika to find solutions to help bring about some sort of

social change (Giroux, 2018). Schools who advocate for this way of working with Pasifika would be developing a culture in their community to support and advance Pasifika forward (Alton-Lee et al., 2003a)

c) **Navigate for Pasifika**

Teachers can be trained to understand *vā* and become navigators for Pasifika in schools. These educators would have sound culturally responsive pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Teaching. They would also continuously *teu le vā*, where they would be working hard to nurture and advance their relationships with Pasifika (Anae, 2010).

More importantly these teachers would recognise the challenges and obstacles presented by the hegemony and *edge-walk* between the Pasifika world and the *Pālagi* world to negotiate a path for their students (Reynolds, 2018). In effect, educators would help to navigate for Pasifika and intervene, especially when interpretations of the worlds are misunderstood. Navigators would help Pasifika survive and thrive in the *Pālagi* world.

Navigators need to have time allocated to them to *teu le vā* with Pasifika students and their families in the first instance (Alton-Lee et al., 2003a; Bishop et al., 2014; Boyd, 2008). Navigators would coach/teach Pasifika students and their families the skills and knowledge that might help Pasifika navigate the hegemony (including school) (Alton-Lee et al., 2003a; Nash, 2000). In the process, Navigators would be working with Pasifika to understand and find solutions that might bring about social change (Biesta, 2020a; H. A. Giroux, 2010).

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