

**A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected
Pasefika Learner Outcomes**

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ABSTRACT

This research is a single site case study about how a Board of Trustees (BoT) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) draw upon, understand, experience and enact the concept of the *vā* to inform leadership strategies that improve Pasefika learner outcomes. It explores the concept of *vā*, the sacred, relational space between people and the importance of relationships in promoting equitable outcomes for Pasefika learners.

As a Pasefika educator and educational leader born to migrant Samoan parents, my work is driven by a fundamental belief that education should empower learners to fulfil their potential, yet I remain deeply concerned by the persistent labelling of our Pasefika learners through deficit-based terms like ‘tail of achievement’, ‘priority learners’ or ‘at risk’. The study utilises the Pasefika research frameworks of Talanoa (meaningful relational conversation), *Teu le vā* (the act of tidying and nurturing the relational space), and *Fa’afaletui* (the weaving together of diverse perspectives). Talanoa sessions took place with nine participants from across the BoT and SLT. The resultant narratives revealed shared experiences of *teu le vā* within the BoT and SLT space; and how it was observed and understood in the school especially with teachers and their interactions with learners.

The findings revealed three main themes:

- Relational *vā*: relationships within the school are based on a foundation of faith and mirror a familial structure where family like relationships create a sense of belonging.
- Leadership as *teu le vā*: leadership is expressed through active stewardship of the *va* and having high levels of relational trust with members of the leadership.
- Cultural capital: The BoT and SLT advocate for acknowledgement of culture, language and identity that the learner brings to the classroom as a pathway to engaging them as learners.

At the core of this study, the *vā* is recognised as an active and sacred catalyst rather than an empty space. It is rooted in *alofa* (love), *fa’aaloalo* (respect) and *tautua* (service) because of the active stewardship from the BoT and SLT. This research carries significant implications for educational practice by challenging school leaders to dismantle systemic biases and to lead from the heart to enhance Pasefika learner outcomes.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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 used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), 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.

Name: **Atua Asafo**

Signature:

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this single site case study is to examine how the vā informs school leadership strategies aimed at enhancing selected Pasefika learner outcomes. There is evidence to show a shift in achievement in this single-site school due to the vā being fostered between the BoT and SLT. When the vā is acknowledged, respected and enacted upon, it creates deep and meaningful connections that influence and empower the learner to be successful. “We are all defined by relationships that connect us and make us who we are as members of collectives” (Chu-Fuluifaga & Reynolds, 2024, p.3)

My fundamental life belief is that everyone is created for a purpose on this earth. Thus, as an educator and leader, I believe our role is to set all our learners on a path to fulfil their God given purpose and potential. My purpose as an educator is to be an agent of change that can aid, direct, guide, unpack, unravel, unlock, expose, chisel, mould, provide opportunities, and ultimately empower learners, fellow educators, colleagues and our learners' families to discover and chase their purpose. The hope is to empower learners, so they are able to stand on their own two feet, contribute, support, care, nurture and uplift their families and especially themselves (Matapo & Baice, 2020).

I was born and raised by migrant Samoan parents, who arrived in New Zealand (NZ) in the early 1970s, and like many migrants, in search of better opportunities to support their families back home and to be afforded the luxury of raising their own families comfortably (Iosia, 2022; Mafile'o et al, 2024; Poumale, 2017; Tuia & Cobb, 2021). I attended mainstream schooling from Year 1 to Year 13 in West Auckland, graduated from University, worked in corporate and am now currently employed as a Deputy Principal. This was a fulfilment and the realisation of my parent's dream, who from early childhood, impressed upon my siblings and I that a good education was essential to success in adulthood.

The term Pasefika is widely used to represent a diverse, collective, multi ethnic representation of people of Pacific Island ancestral ties, that are born or who have migrated to NZ and identify with the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau and other Pacific populations who are not heavily represented in the NZ population (Airini et al., 2010; Atkinson, 2013; Cooper et al., 2024; Douglas 2025; Easthope-Harper, 2018; Matapo, 2019). It is also pertinent to understand the term Pasifika or Pasefika, is representative of a collective of Pacific Island cultures, an umbrella term that disregards ethnic-specific each way of practice, identities and

cultural differences (Matapo, 2019). A key point to note is that there are two spelling variations when referring to Pacific Island people; Pasifika and Pasefika. The term 'Pasifika' is formally used and coined by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (MoE) when referring to Pacific Island peoples (Airini et al., 2010; Averill & Rimoni, 2019; Douglas, 2025). The term 'Pasefika' is commonly found in Pacific language research (Talení et al., 2018). In the context of this study, I use the term Pasefika. My preference is to use indigenous correct spelling of transliterate words that represent the Pacific Island cultures and languages.

RATIONALE

My motivation stems from my own personal concern and unease that Pasefika learners are still underachieving and labelled with words such as 'high priority' and 'at risk' or 'tail of achievement' (Hunter et al. 2024; Nanai, 2018, Talení et al., 2018). As an educator, to see your own people struggle empowers you to help in whatever way possible because you understand the challenges they face. I understand that I alone cannot make the change and I acknowledge the many who have gone before me and those that are still fighting in the front line for equitable outcomes for Pasefika learners.

My secondary motivation arises from my perspective as a colleague of those who struggle with engaging our Pasefika learners. Despite the support, some still find it difficult and have alluded that Pasefika learners only engage when there is a Pasefika educator standing in front of them. This goes against my belief as I have also witnessed colleagues of non-Pasefika descent engage and successfully build relationships with their Pasefika learners, as Si'ilata (2014, as cited in Sililoto, 2022) states. Despite ethnic and background differences, teachers can enhance their practice by building meaningful connections with Pasefika learners. I also believe that regardless of culture, age, or gender, when educators demonstrate genuine care for learners' lives, interests, values and success, they are more likely to gravitate towards them and willingly engage and participate in the learning process.

Another important reason as to why it matters is because according to Statistics New Zealand (2023), Pacific Islanders (also known as Pasefika) make up 8.9 percent of the population. By 2043, the population of Pacific peoples is projected to reach 665,000, which is 11 percent of the population. Most notably is the growth in Pacific population for under 15 years from 12 percent of the total population in 2006 to 14 percent in 2018. With the growing population of Pacific peoples, we therefore need to have consistent, robust conversation and research to inform policy. We must also be able to circumvent and enact strategies to support the success of future Pasefika learners.

My experience as a Deputy Principal affords me the perspective of observing how teachers engage with their Pasefika learners. In my own experience as a teacher, the dilemma I believe is mainly about building positive relationships and knowing the *vā* between myself as a teacher and the learner, as well as the *vā* between myself and my colleagues, learner families and communities (Anae, 2010). Other reasons for under-achievement in Pasefika learners could be deficit thinking, low expectations of learners, disengagement due to unrelatable opportunities and teachers not showing any interest in learner identity, culture and language (Bonne & Spiller, 2017). However, I predominately think the *vā* is very complex and multi-layered, but it acknowledges the sacred space between relations (Anae, 2010). It is essentially about genuinely caring and respecting another person enough to really get to know and connect with them, despite their culture, age, race, gender or societal placing. When the *vā* is recognised, valued, honoured, seen and consciously practiced in reciprocity, it unlocks engagement, motivation, trust, transfer of knowledge and effectively breaks barriers that limit optimal learning outcomes. According to both Anae (2010) and Reynolds (2016), having a secure and positive connection between the learner and the teacher enhances learner achievement.

The aim of this research is to look specifically at the *vā* (relational space), the fostering of the *vā* by a BoT and SLT; how it influences and shapes those who have a shared interest in the success of Pasefika learners. The *vā* is positioned as an instrument to help develop, support and maintain relationships between BoT, SLT, parents, caregivers, immediate family, extended family, educators, support staff, students, community and the learner themselves. The *vā* goes beyond surface level and requires a deep and genuine heart to serve by connecting and giving your all to the community that you serve (Talení et al., 2017). It connects leaders, staff, learners, families and communities who are learner centric and want only the best for the learner. It is through this deep and meaningful relationship building that allows the learner to see that their teachers value and care about them (Atkinson, 2013). The hope is that this case study will be used to support other BoT and SLT to use some of the strategies implemented and to really get a grasp of the importance of building the culture of *vā* between themselves, teachers, learners and family.

VĀ MATTERS

It has been documented there are persistent and significant disparities between the achievement of Pasefika learners and their peers in the NZ education system (Easthope-Harper, 2018). For some time, it has been evident that Pasefika achievement has been referred to with the use of deficit-based terminology such as 'priority learners', 'at risk', 'disengaged' and 'under achievers' (Talení et al., 2018). According to Matapo and McFall-McCaffery (2022), one of the MoE foci has been on Pasefika under achievement. The MoE over the past few decades have acknowledged the need and urgency to intervene and introduced a series of initiatives to lift Pasefika learner success. MoE

programmes or support strategies such as the Action Plan for Pacific Education (APPE) 2020-2030 policy (MoE, 2020a); literature reviews on Best Practice for teaching Pacific Learners: Pacific Evidence Brief 2019 (MoE, 2020b); Tapasa: Cultural competencies framework for teachers of Pacific Learners (MoE, 2018); Talanoa Ako Pasefika Success Professional Learning Development (PLD), National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) ma Le Pasefika workshops in amongst other resources, so as to aid teachers and school leaders on how to raise Pasefika learner outcomes.

THE VĀ AND ME

In my own experience as a Pasefika educator, knowing the vā is integral to building respectful, successful, workable relationships with my learners and colleagues. The vā is sacred because it is powerfully impactful when wielded correctly. The vā speaks of a sacred space; unspoken boundaries, but one that I was semi-inducted into whilst growing up as a NZ born Samoan, whose parents were and still are deeply rooted in all things traditional to the Samoan culture. It has taught me to be humble at the most difficult of times; to be firm, unbiased; to know my place and role; but it has also taught me that humility comes from a place of strength and acknowledging the respectful space between each other. I am a firm believer that when addressing students, that respect goes both ways. Respect and knowing your boundaries is reciprocal. It can be seen or unseen; and that the integrity of an educator hinges on how you relate and respond to your learners. This research matters because not all educators are exposed to the deep learnings of the vā (Anae, 2010); especially with how to engage, respond and relate to Pasefika learners. The call for professional development for culture specific practices is needed for such engagement to take place (Si'ilata et al., 2018).

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTION

This case study sought to understand how the vā shapes school leadership strategies to enhance selected Pasefika learner outcomes. The research aimed to examine how the BoT and SLT understand and apply the vā to inform strategies to develop, support and raise Pasefika academic achievement. The research objective and aims were reflected in three research questions which have formed the basis of this single site case study.

1. How do the Board of Trustees or Senior Leadership Team understand and experience the vā?
2. What strategies have the Board of Trustees or Senior Leadership Team used to enhance selected Pasefika learner outcomes?
3. How is the vā evident in Board of Trustees or Senior Leadership Team strategies for improving selected Pasefika learner outcomes?

This research uses a culturally response approach, guided by the concept of vā, to explore how relationships built on respect and reciprocity can influence educational outcomes. The Fa'afaletui (Tamasese et al., 2005), is a Samoan research framework that looks at the process of weaving, integrating and gathering different perspectives of various groups. I have selected this framework because of this and how the gathering of different perspectives can collectively contribute impact and influence learner outcomes. The method of collection used is Talanoa which is deeply rooted in practice in Pasefika culture. It refers to meaningful conversations, understanding and respectfully knowing your vā. Talanoa is used as a vehicle to aid in the building of meaningful and trustworthy relationships, collecting, and analysing data for this single site case study.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

Chapter One provides an overview of the research rationale and its connection to the main aims of this research topic which is a case study of how the vā shapes school leadership strategies to enhance selected Pasefika learner outcomes.

Chapter Two presents a literature review that examines key themes identified in the literature relevant to the study. It looks at teu le vā and the relational vā as catalysts for equitable learner outcomes. It explores the pedagogy of the heart, the importance of fostering the vā and the role of governance and leadership in maintaining the vā.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology and design. The reasons for utilising the talanoa methodology, methods, data collection, analysis and how the Fa'afaletui framework is relevant to this case study methodology.

Chapter Four we present the data and findings through the main themes and sub themes. The findings are categorised thematically and then organised into the following main themes: Relational vā; Leadership as Teu le vā and Cultural capital.

Chapter Five offers a critical analysis of the findings, then links the findings to current research.

Chapter Six concludes the case study with a summary of reflections, recommendations for practical consideration and possible limitations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines some of the literature related to the objectives of this case study and research questions. The research aims and questions seek to understand how the BoT and SLT leadership give meaning to the framework of 'teu le vā' (to nurture, vāalue, to keep tidy the social and sacred relational spaces) (Anae, 2010) and how the vā is experienced, fostered, maintained and enacted upon to influence positive relationships with Pasefika learners, families and the community. School leaders act as cultural navigators who foster the vā by being inclusive and culturally responsive in response to Pasefika cultural values of alofa (love), fa'aaloalo (respect) and tautua (service). A pedagogy of the heart looks at authenticity and genuine care as a catalyst for the success of the learner. This literature review acknowledges and affirms cultural identity and cultural values that act as anchors to establishing more culturally grounded relationships to support Pasefika learner success. Furthermore, it discusses how governance (BoT) and leadership (SLT) need to work together in alignment with a school's vision so that it can enhance learner outcomes. In the next few paragraphs, I have bolded specific words as a focus point for that paragraph and defined what this looks like in the context of the relational vā between school leaders.

'TEU' le vā.

This section looks at how the Samoan philosophical concept of teu le vā, is deeply rooted in its cultural reference that calls for relationships to be at the centre. Teu le vā is a Samoan practice that is about looking after, protecting, nurturing, honouring and maintaining the vā, or the space between people (Anae, 2010). Relationships between parties (in this context: BoT and SLT, Pasefika learner, educators, family and community) are the key to unlocking the potential within our Pasefika learners. It is not a one way 'street', but reciprocal, where individuals are respectful of the sacred space, in how they nurture and value the relational space. According to Airini et al., (2010) the 'vā' is best understood as an unseen, yet intuitive relational space of how one relates to another. In layman's terms the vā is space, the betweenness, but it is not an empty 'space' but one that connects all things (Wendt, 1999, as cited in Reynolds, 2016).

In the Samoan language 'teu' means to tidy up or put away. It is important to note that there are 14 core alphabet letters in the Samoan language and an additional three letters that were later added on to help translate English words to the Samoan language, and these letters were borrowed from the English alphabet. Due to the smaller number of letters in the alphabet, some Samoan words are homographs. Therefore, the meaning of the word 'teu' is completely contextual and can mean various and sometimes similar things. According to Milner (2001), 'teu' can mean to 'look after' or

'put away' when referring to an object; to 'pack' a bag; to 'store up or save' food or money for a journey; to 'bury' a loved one; to 'adjust' a garment on your persons; to 'dress, decorate' your hair or face; to 'welcome, receive guests'; or to say 'thank you for your welcome and courtesy' when receiving formal gifts. For this single site case study and in this philosophical context, 'teu' means to 'look after' or 'tidy up' the space (Airini et al., 2010). The word 'teu' is a verb, to 'teu' is to show an action, to do, to organise, to prepare. In reference to 'teu le vā', it is a command verb or an instruction and acts as an imperative verb. To 'teu' requires action, it is requesting you to do something and in reference to 'teu le vā' it is not said lightly but used in conjunction with a request for someone to take action, to bring peace, calm and understanding into a situation that requires 'tidying up'.

Teu le 'VĀ'.

According to the Samoan dictionary (Milner, 2001) the meaning of 'vā' is also context dependent. It can mean to 'be divided or separated' in reference to physical location. The 'vā' could be used to describe when one is on 'bad terms, estranged' or showing tension between people. It could also denote the distance and space between places, things and people. Furthermore, it can be used in a relational context between people or things and also in contexts of conflict; it can convey the meaning of 'between', when referring to a dispute or quarrel. In the context of this single site case study, vā is the 'relational space' or the sacred space between that brings entities together and makes sense of things (Airini et al., 2010; Wendt, 1996 as cited in Taleni & Surtees, 2024). Poltarak (2007, as cited in Reynolds, 2016) suggests the word relatedness is a more accurate translation of vā, which in turn looks at the degree of intensity of relationships. In contrast, rather than just looking at 'vā' as relationships, Reynolds (2016) seeks to understand and explore the differences of relational connections. The vā acknowledges the intertwining or weaving of a multitude of cultural variations. Airini et al., (2010) explores the Samoan concept of vā, to a Tongan concept. A Samoan sense of self is reliant on the relational interactions that occur in the vā, or the space between. The Samoan 'vā' has multiple narratives as each entity relates to another differently. There is vā tapuia (the sacred relational and connection space), vā fealoa'i (the social interaction space); vā fa'atamali'i (the chiefly hierarchical relational space, chief between chief); vā fa'afaleupolu (the sacred relationships between oratory or talking matai), just to name a few of the different relational vā's.

Through a Tongan lens, the vā is a space or distance (apart and between) and about mutual relationships. The Tongan vā comprises of four main categories: physical, symbolic, intellectual and social, where each exists independently, yet in relationship to one another (Ka'ili, 2005, as cited in Reynolds, 2016). The Tongan perspective also recognises that the vā must be nurtured and looked after. In relation to achieving better outcomes for Pasefika learners, the vā cannot be individual

focused but relational focus and must look at how to nurture and maintain respectful relationships (Airini et al., 2010).

The *vā* is also seen through a spatial lens to help understand the spiritual and secular perspectives of relationships (Airini et al., 2010). The *vā* is holistic because it encompasses the physical spatial concept, the spiritual, the wellbeing, it showcases the depth and value of relationships. It is inter-dependent yet the *vā* is only mentioned regarding social and relational points of view. The *vā* is also physical, proximal, mental and spiritual. It is tangible and unseen. It requires constant evaluation and reflection as to how to approach the *vā* and is dependent on the intensity of the relationship. It is therefore not one dimensional, but multifaceted and continues to evolve and is dependent on time, environment and space. The '*vā*' seems almost boxed in and limited to just spatial awareness and there is not much research on the spiritual *vā*, which is not innate but nurtured culturally into each individual by explicit teaching from a person's village or through a person's candid observation of the world around them. The *vā* is a phenomenon, a Pasefika world view, that helps Pasefika to navigate the western world safely with humility. When observing the *vā* *fealoa'i* between matai (Samoan chief) they may attend a village fono (meeting) with differing opinions on a village matter, but there is a common mutual understanding that when discussed, the respectful *vā* between the matai is practiced with patience and humility. Though at times things may get heated or should issues of conflict arise, some matai may interject and say '*teu le vā*', which in this context means to tidy up, or to keep the peace.

'TEU LE VĀ'

To '*teu*' is the action of tidying up, nurturing or valuing the *vā*, which is the '*relational space*' (Airini et al., 2010). In the context of this case study, I am looking at how BoT and SLT '*teu le vā*' (nurture the relational space) between each other and how it is enacted from a leadership point of view in pursuit of optimal outcomes for Pasefika learners. Building meaningful connections and relationships is achievable when one can nurture the space in between, through enacting reciprocal respect between an educator and a learner. This is achieved through many avenues, but mostly revolves around creating and building into the relationships, by taking the time and effort to not look at minority learners through a lens of deficiency, but rather by educators challenging their own assumptions and biases; by valuing and acknowledging a learners cultural funds of knowledge, their identity and language; or by integrating Pacific worldviews into the curriculum and the way of school life.

The single site case study focus is on the leadership and governance of the school whose main objective is to change educational outcomes for Pasefika learners who historically have been marginalised, faced systemic disadvantage or experienced disparities in the education system. According to Si'ilata et al., (2023) educational leaders of Pasefika learners are envisioned through a

metaphor of Pacific wayfinding (Tautai o le Moana). A collaborative effort between the MoE and the NZ Pasefika Principals Association sought to demonstrate the importance of Pacific specific leadership for schools with Pasefika learners. Principals were metaphorically seen as the tautai (navigator) to steer the vaka (canoe) towards success. The goal being to improve educational outcomes for Pasefika learners which required school leaders to rethink their practice in Pasefika education (Reynolds, 2018) and look towards culturally anchored practices (Si'ilata et al., 2023). Like a tautai, school leaders learned to interpret and read the signs, adjust the sails (strategies) accordingly, reset and draw on diverse indigenous knowledge to enable culturally inclusive school environments, but this could only be achieved via reciprocal relationships with learners and their families (Si'ilata et al., 2023).

When educational leaders and educators can teu le vā, they become the protectors or the shield of the sacredness of all things relational. Educational success from a Pasefika perspective is seen as a collective effort, if one succeeds, they attribute this success to the village that has supported them, they recognise the spiritual element in carrying their ancestors with them (Matapo & Baice, 2020), this is the sacred spiritual space that Pasefika carry. Their success enhances the overall wellbeing of the collective. It is about how one relates to other relationships that occur in the vā. In a Pasefika learner's eyes, they protect themselves individually and their loved ones by knowing how to relate to them and by acknowledging the vā from a family perspective, which is the vā that nurtures, that protects, that shields and that uplifts in times of hardship. When school leaders are able to look after and nurture the space, learners and their families are more inclined to come into the school grounds and participate in school life. Nurturing the space can look like providing a warm and accepting environment, but most importantly the initiation from school leaders to build genuine and personal relationships with learners and their families (Talení et al., 2017).

TAUSI LE VĀ

As an educator, I wear multiple hats and bring to the table my cultural responsibilities that I carry as a daughter of a high chief, a sister, a mother, a matai (chief) with responsibilities not only to my immediate family but also to my extended family and the communities I serve in. So, when I have to teu (tidy, nurture, care and foster) the vā, I also have to tausi (sustain, maintain, caretake, guide, guard and protect) the vā. Stewardship and accountability to the role of an educational leader is not a role that I take lightly. It means investing not only my time but also understanding that this is my calling and purpose at this given time. It is by no mistake that I am in these positions because I believe I am called to this sphere of influence. My other hats of responsibility come into play by the experiences I have had in these settings, and it equips me with many perspectives of how to make decisions whilst still respecting the vā. To tausi le vā means I am the tausimea. I am the guardian

that takes care of the measina (treasure). In reference as a leader, I am a guardian that takes care of the learners (our treasure, our measina).

Like the fa'a-Matai, they take care of the teachers, maintain their relationships with teachers, strengthen their relationships with children, all for the collective purpose of the safety, health and wellbeing of the children. This all contributes to children's success in their education. (Talení, 2023, p. 106)

RELATIONALITY

Relationality is one of the pillars in improving learner outcomes. Research shows that quality relationships in education positively influences learner outcomes by up to 59% (Airini et al., 2010). Similarly, Si'ilata et al. (2018) asserts that high quality teaching is foundational to managing the diverse learning needs of Pasefika learners and is key to attaining equitable outcomes for these learners. Leaders who were able to connect deeply with learner's families by acknowledging their diverse cultural identities were linked to improved learner outcomes (Alton-Lee, 2011). When learners feel safe (emotionally and spiritually), supported, engaged and understood; a culture of care is fostered (which eliminates fear and shame of participating in class discussions); meaningful dialogue is enacted, thus allowing both the learner and teacher to build on their relationship on a deeper level. This family-like approach to the classroom is fundamental, as it allows the learner to feel a sense of belonging, valued, loved, culturally validated and the approach supports accelerated learning (Bishop, 2019; Douglas, 2025).

PEDAGOGY OF THE HEART

Being relational and adapting to the nurturing of the vā can be explored by the connecting from the heart and by the values one holds. According to Talení and Surtees (2024) they symbolically use a ula (necklace), with the string representing what ties the flowers together and its importance to the role of the heart in a body. The string illustrates the connecting of all things to the heart and without the heart, nothing can survive. Metaphorically speaking the flowers in the ula signifies the content that is being taught to Pasefika learners, and the heart is how the teachers deliver the content. It depicts the fostering of a relationship by how teachers deliver the lesson by listening and allowing the heart to lead, which allows them to go above and beyond for their Pasefika learners. Similarly, Douglas (2025) suggests that building a relationship with your learner involves acting from the heart which is imperative when teaching Pasefika learners. Some of the Pasefika cultural values include alofa (love), fa'aaloalo (respect); fa'amaualalo (humility); fetausia'i (reciprocity) and tautua (service). The positioning of your heart in how you view your role as a leader or teacher can aid you in how you relate to others (Talení & Surtees, 2024). The act of nurturing the vā comes from a place of

where one sees value in the other and you can only foster and nurture something that you genuinely care about. These core values are deeply embedded in the fostering of the relational vā.

FOSTERING OF THE VĀ

The framework of *teu le vā* supports the success of Pasefika learners (Airini et al., 2010; Reynolds, 2019). It shifts the focus from colonised, westernised, Eurocentric ways of learning which are heavily individualistic to an approach that is relational, holistic, decolonised, connected and a more collective Pasefika way of thinking that is familiar to Pasefika learners (Airini et al., 2010; Si'ilata et al., 2023). This approach ensures that optimal relationships are formed when nurturing and tidying up of the betweenness occurs. Pasefika learners feel a sense of connectedness, relatedness but most of all a sense of belonging (Reynolds, 2016) in a world that is different to theirs. Reynolds (2019) is also in agreement that the quality of relationships is a crucial factor in accelerating learner progress.

Within Samoan cultural educational expectations, the learner culture is passive, meaning learners respect, listen and observe as opposed to Western learner expectations that encourage active participation in classes. As such, *teu le vā* allows for the creation of safe spaces where Pasefika learners feel safe, supported and confident to participate in class dialogue. Some teachers assume that Pasefika learners are aloof, shy or quiet (Reynolds, 2017; 2019) but in their lived reality their cultural upbringing teaches them to be passive, humble, respectful and not forthcoming in class dialogue because it contradicts their own way of life (Reynolds, 2017). There is a need for educators to get to know their learner as people with cultural nuances attached and not just as a learner (Talení et al., 2017). To move beyond passive learning experiences in classrooms, leaders and educators must advocate for *teu le vā*, where relational trust is built thus allowing Pasefika learners to feel safe, accepted and courageous enough to take 'risks' to participate in class dialogue. Effective leadership is having the ability to develop and sustain relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003., as cited in Talení et al., 2018). This enables the development of mutual trust and understanding the strengths and vulnerabilities of the team and being able to navigate this with integrity. According to Talení et al., (2017) the Education Review Office (ERO) (2016) reported that one of the key factors as to how educational leaders could improve learner outcomes is by building relational trust and being able to work collaboratively. Educators can also become more culturally affirming where they allow for Pasefika learners to lead in areas they excel in (Reynolds, 2017) which allows for their voices to be heard and celebrated. These are only a couple of examples as to how the vā is nurtured between teachers and learners to encourage and build positive relationships with Pasefika learners.

The vā can be fostered by leadership by adopting family-like relationships. One of the drivers of educational success for Māori learners is the quality of teacher-student relationships and culturally responsive practice where identity, language and culture were acknowledged and celebrated (Bishop, 2019). Negative classroom teacher interactions, unconscious bias and assumptions by

educators were seen as the main barriers to learner acceleration, as opposed to traditional reasons such as socio-economic factors for underachievement. According to Bishop (2019) there was a dramatic shift in the engagement and progress of Māori students when classroom relationships shifted from a one-way street of transmission style of learning to culturally responsive practice. When learners feel care, love, safe, genuine concern to succeed, activity leads to greater engagement and connectivity. Relationships were central to their understanding of their own worldview and their value in the world. Classrooms would therefore be places where learners could express themselves freely in interaction and dialogue.

Fostering the *vā* at a leadership level also looks at being proactive and engaging on a relational level. Being proactive involves taking deliberate practical steps in building dynamic relationships to make their physical presence known within the school or community environment. Such practice may also look like *tautai* actively engaging in learning or taking an interest in minority languages and cultures, promoting inclusivity which in turn makes learners' families feel welcomed, valued and courageous enough to become participants or volunteers in school events (Talení et al., 2017). Building the connection between the learner's family, embracing diversity and making meaningful connections with a learner's community is paramount to their learners' learning and wellbeing (Talení et al., 2017). Concentric rings are used to describe the development of these relationships (Talení et al., 2017) with family and community and it can be likened to a ripple effect of positive impact for learners. Community engagement also aids in the shift of cultural assumptions or biases that are often imposed, Talení et al., (2017) notes that assumptions of people only shift once there is active engagement in the practice of getting to know one another.

Another way of strengthening the practice of cultivating the *vā* at a leadership level is via leadership participating in informal or formal PLD. Drawing on Alton-Lee's (2011) research into educational improvement, she starts this article off by noting that the NZ MoE's Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) findings reveal that when *tautai* (school leaders or navigators) promote and/or engage in PLD, this practice alone has greater influence on student learner outcomes in comparison to other leadership practices. The BES was established to gather evidence about what was not working and what was working to accelerate learner outcomes. Alton-Lee (2011) advocates that high impact research based PLD is effective together with a professional inquiry model and has the potential to improve education in general. The effectiveness of the PLD, is for leadership to sustain ongoing opportunities for inquiry learning by teachers by availing time for teachers to marinate and apply their new learnings and understandings. An example is making PLD on the framework of *teu le vā* to expose and familiarise educators with the concept and to support educators in recognising, addressing and challenging unconscious bias and attitudes (Reynolds, 2019). Educational leaders can foster the *vā* by assuming the *tautai* (navigator) role. According to Si'ilata et al., (2023) professional leadership development (PLD) was led by Pasefika principals for principals of Pasefika learners whose main

objective was to accelerate Pasefika learner outcomes. PLD facilitators had pre-established relationships with many tautai, fostering a strong sense of connectedness as they moved forward together collectively.

A key approach to fostering the vā is a paradigm shift from deficit thinking to an asset-based view of Pasefika learners through valuing the diverse knowledge, expertise, relational skills, lived experiences and values they bring to the group (Airini et al., 2010). Pasefika learners have traditionally been at the bottom of the barrel or the tail of underachievement in Eurocentric measurement of educational success. There needs to be accountability by teachers to set aside their biases, negative assumptions and deficit stereotypical perspectives (Hunter et al., 2016 as cited in Matapo & Baice, 2020) and mentally shift to have high expectations that every learner has the potential to achieve and build their capacity (Airini et al., 2010; Alton-Lee, 2011; Bishop, 2019). Principals are also challenged to set high expectations not only for learners, but also their staff and leadership; and to embed these high expectations across the board within the culture of the school (Atkinson, 2013).

Addressing systemic racism is another way educational leaders can uphold the vā and promote optimal relational connections. “Teu le vā takes a strategic, evidence-based, outcomes-focused, Pasefika success approach. Every Pasefika learner in New Zealand should succeed educationally. The teu le vā approach is about making that happen” (Airini et al., 2010, p. 2). Nurturing the vā means tidying up the spaces within the school structures, curriculum, culture of the school, pedagogy, relationships, pre-conceived assumptions and biases. Educational leaders have the power to transform the Western educational systems that have historically underserved minority learners, to a system that draws on minority learners' cultural capital as a strength for academic success, guided by a wayfinding approach (Si'ilata et al., 2023). Pasefika learners are known as the ‘brown tail’ of achievement statistics (Reynolds, 2017) in comparison to other demographic populations in NZ education. Pasifika educational challenges can be remedied through the honouring of cultural onto-epistemology (ways of knowing, being and relating to the world) an act of decolonising education to encompass the strengths Pasefika learners bring (Matapo & Baice, 2020).

PASEFIKA EDUCATION IN NEW ZEALAND

Pasefika learners have historically achieved lower outcomes (Talen, 2023) in comparison to non-Pasefika learners in New Zealand education. The disparity with Pasefika underachievement is attributed to a range of factors. I have often heard that Pasefika are failing the system, but it can also be argued that systemic factors also contribute to their underachievement. One of the New Zealand Education and Training Acts (MoE, 1989) key objectives is to help every child and young person to attain educational achievement to the best of their potential. Therefore, equitable outcomes and engagement of Pasefika learners is pertinent to achieving the objectives of the Act.

Pacific people migrated to New Zealand in significant numbers during the 1950's as a response to New Zealand's labour shortage, and as a result New Zealand have a large and diverse Pasefika population with most being NZ born; thus the Pacific learner population is growing rapidly and it is predicted to be approximately 20% of the school population by 2050 (MoE, 2020a), they represent a major part of New Zealand's future social and economic prosperity. Therefore, it is essential for the New Zealand education system to support all Pasefika learners to reach their potential. There have been educational gains by Pasefika learners over the years, but they are still experiencing significant disparities in achievement (MoE, 2020b).

The New Zealand Education system is influenced by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which is a global policy actor for many individual nations. The OECD runs a Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). These results are used to measure NZ's standing in education across the globe. Regarding PISA, Thrupp (1996) argued against PISA, because it does not take into account socio-economic and poverty issues; its data also reinforces deficit theorising of Pasefika learners and highlights New Zealand's failure to address equity.

According to Matapo (2021), New Zealand aligned their educational policies and strategies to economic trends and global standards of education, therefore discarding local knowledge and option for global knowledge. In addition, Matapo also mentions that "Pacific indigenous epistemology and intersubjectivity as a feature of transformation in education for Pasefika people was not considered" (Matapo, 2021, p. 80). This accentuates that Pasefika learners are measured against a Eurocentric epistemology and must learn to navigate and succeed in Eurocentric measure of success. In effect the New Zealand education system is not designed for the fa'a Pasefika approaches of teaching and learning. Bridging this gap to gain optimal success requires educational leaders to understand and enact the vā in order to promote Pasefika learner success.

To transform Pasefika learner outcomes, various New Zealand MoE formal documents, reviews, analyses, quantitative indicators, statistical snapshots, frameworks, programmes, initiatives, evidence-based reports, action plans have come into play over the last four decades to improve Pasefika learner outcomes by providing quality and effective teaching pedagogies and strategies for educational leadership to implement and enact. During the 1980s, the education system was predominantly Eurocentric and there was no recognition of cultural diversity, as minority cultures were expected to assimilate or integrate into mainstream education.

The 1990s saw the MoE respond with formal policies to improve Pasefika learner outcomes. This showed the government's commitment to transform learner outcomes, and it stems from an original document in 1996, *Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai: Pasifika Pacific Islands People's Education in Aotearoa New*

Zealand (MoE, 1996) that the MoE introduced to celebrate Pasefika Educational success in New Zealand. Some of the strategies that were implemented via PLD were about making school environments culturally responsive to diverse learner needs and learning approaches; engaging in collective and collaborative learning approaches; promoting shared ownership and participatory support for the learner; validation of a learners culture, language and identity in curriculum learning; understanding of dialogic communicative misconceptions; inclusive decision making with the learner, family and community. These strategies were promoted through the Pacific Action Plans for equitable outcomes for Pasefika learner's starting from 1996 until its current Action Plan for Pasifika Education 2020-2030 (MoE, 2020a).

During the 2000s, Pasefika education was prioritised by the New Zealand government as there was a progressive gap in Pasefika learner outcomes and more research evidence surfaced to support and acknowledge the need for cultural responsiveness as a significant driving factor of change. The MoE Action plans now begin to shift their focus on educational leaders and teachers and how they could re-think their teaching practice and pedagogy to provide equitable outcomes (Talení, 2023). One of the major MoE documents to support this new perspective is *Tapasa: Cultural Competency Framework for Teachers of Pacific Learners* (MoE, 2018). Over the years, the MoE continuously monitors and reviews these plans by having measuring tools in place to gauge implementation, enactment, engagement and any notable adjustments that need to be made.

GOVERNANCE AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

This single site case study looks at how governance and leadership utilise the *vā* to inform strategies to enhance Pasefika learner outcomes. The governance and leadership of a school need to work together and have mutual accountability as their partnerships are interdependent (Youngs et al., 2007). Governance is the overarching umbrella that shapes the political side of leadership through school policy implementation and focuses more on the strategic planning, legal, property, personnel, management of finances, ministerial reporting and operational priorities that contribute to and monitor the school's quality and standards (Uiterwijk-Lujik et al., 2019; Wilkins & Gobby, 2021; Youngs et al., 2007). The BoT act as the established group that practices governance and responds to the needs of their communities and are responsible for organisational outcomes (Youngs et al., 2007). The role of the school leaders (Principal and SLT) is to support and align itself with the BoT's vision. The SLT are accountable to stakeholders and are also responsible most importantly for the day-to-day management of the school (Poumale, 2017; Youngs et al., 2007)

Research highlights the strong collaboration between governance and educational leaders working together in partnership to ensure positive learner outcomes (Talení, 2023). The key relationship is the partnership between the BoT and the principal (Youngs et al., 2007). If both parties are aligned

in their vision it will reflect on how well they work together collectively as their relationship influences the commitment and motivation of teachers (Uiterwijk-Luikj et al., 2019; Youngs et al., 2007). The partnership requires both the BoT and SLT to work collectively to marry the external demands on schools and the schools' goals and strategies. If relations are strained, due to clarity of roles and responsibilities or varying perspectives and visions it can hinder effective collaboration and impact the overall functioning of the school, so it is important that relational trust, mutual respect is established between both the BoT and the Principal. This reiterates the importance of the relational communication and interaction between the board chair and the principal, as it impacts the enactment of school management and school governance (Youngs et al., 2007). For equitable outcomes, the board chair must create and maintain effective interactions between all BoT and SLT so that they are moving in unison towards the shared vision they carry for the school. Consistent, regular and transparent contact between the Board Chair and the principal allows for the fostering of this relational space which will be built upon mutual trust, respect and clear communication (Youngs et al., 2007).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

This single site case study utilized qualitative research approaches because it focused on making meaning of knowledge via participants interpretation and co-construction of knowledge (Vaiotei, 2006). This research reflects a Pacific malaga (journey), where there are natural rhythms of rolling waves that pull and return certain beliefs due to my upbringing as a tama'ita'i (woman) Samoa, a Christian, a daughter, a sister, a mother, a Matai (Samoa chief), an educator and an educational leader. My pathway is guided by my experiences, knowledge shared and nurtured, relationships and how to relate to one another; and most importantly by having a clear sense of intentional purpose that our work should be of service and care towards others. This study is guided by Pacific ways of knowing which honours and respects relationships and cultural values of trust, respect, service and love. As discussed in Chapter One, the purpose of this research was to better understand how a BoT and the SLT interpret and apply the concept of vā within their leadership practice. This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this single site case study to explore how the Pacific relational understanding of vā influences school leadership strategies.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the BoT and SLT understand and experience the concept of vā?
2. What strategies have the BoT and SLT used to enhance selected Pasefika learner outcomes?
3. How is the concept of vā evident in BoT and SLT strategies for improving selected Pasefika learner outcomes?

Due to the nature of this cultural and relational case study, the Pacific methodological approach of talanoa has been used because it is culturally appropriate and allows for participants to share their perspectives and lived experiences using their own way of understanding and knowledge base (Vaiotei, 2006). This case study also draws on the Pacific research frameworks of teu le vā (tidy up the space) and Fa'afaletui, which focuses on the weaving of knowledge, connectivity, cultural grounding, nurturing of relationships and relational values with participants (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022).

The primary research methodology used in this case study is talanoa, which allows for participants to foster authentic sharing of lived experiences and relationships that Western narrative interviews may not be able to capture due to the detachment role of researcher and participant (Cooper, 2025; Vaiotei, 2006). The framework of teu le vā looks at the ways in which relationships have been established, maintained, sustained and honoured. Alongside this, the foundational Samoan

research framework of Fa'afaletui (Tamasese et al., 2005) looks at the process of weaving, integrating and gathering different perspectives of various groups to create new knowledge (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022). Its literal meaning 'fa'a (way of being), fale (house) and tui (weaving), is reflective of a Pacific philosophy that values relationality and shared understanding. The participants had talanoa sessions, and it is from this collective sharing of lived experiences that we will see the weaving and gathering of the different perspectives of how the vā is practiced and how it influences leadership strategies to improve student learning outcomes. Also, before the action of 'weaving' takes place, it is important to note that there was a considerable amount of preparation required in advance and this is synonymous to the behind the scenes work that the BoT and SLT leaders do to address issues to improve learner outcomes.

The sharing of lived experiences and narratives gathered through talanoa with the participants were analysed using thematic analysis so that key patterns and themes could be identified from the participants' lived experiences. Talanoa is not merely just about having a conversation, but it is a practice that is deeply rooted in Pasefika culture. It is about knowing the vā between yourself and others, understanding and respecting this relational space and building trustworthy, deep and meaningful relationships.

FA'AFALLETUI

A Fa'afaletui lens guides this data inquiry, which provides a culturally grounded alternative worldview to dominant Eurocentric ways of thinking in research. Although Fa'afaletui originates from Samoa, it is prevalent and widely shared amongst Pacific philosophies of collectivity and connectivity as opposed to Western frameworks of individualism. It recognises the importance of different perspectives, values and interactive discussion to form a collective consensus, thus encouraging the weaving of knowledge, codesign and reciprocity between researchers and other stakeholders (Goodyear-Smith & Ofanoa, 2022). Cultural values such as love (alofa), humility (fa'amaualalo), respect (fa'aaloalo), faith (fa'atuatua), family (aiga), service (tautua) are woven into the participants' narratives. It is through the weaving of stories, heart connections, knowledge, lived experiences, and cultural values that highlights the importance of maintaining relationships for the growth and success of others.

This alternative paradigm of weaving holds significance in the Fa'afaletui approach and resonates with me from my own lived experience as an educator who wears multiple hats in my sphere of influence within my immediate family, extended family, chiefly commitments, village expectations and as an educational leader. The weaving is through my lived experiences of knowing the value of teu'ing (tidying and nurturing) the vā and interacting in the dominant and minority societal expectations (Goodyear-Smith & Ofanoa, 2022). The weaving together of the different houses (representative of the many hats I wear) helps to form my perspective and gives me a holistic outlook

when making decisions. In this case study it recognises the importance of different perspectives of the *vā* by the BoT and SLT members. Each participant brings their own realities, experiences of the *vā* and their interpretation from their own lived experience of how to support Pasefika learner outcomes. The task then is to weave together the different strands of knowledge and experiences of people's narratives into a single, but unified and cohesive fabric. Metaphorically the weaving of narratives, reflects the process of connecting and engaging, and is viewed as a sacred art form.

This chapter explains the talanoa, *teu le vā* and *fa'afaletui* methodological frameworks that guides and outlines the research design, participant selection, data collection process and the steps taken to analyse the data. Ethical considerations and the relational responsibilities involved in conducting research within Pacific contexts are also discussed.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Positioning

The foundation or rationale to explore this research topic stems from my own experiences as an educator and currently as a Senior Educational Leader. Through my years of observing the differences in how Pasefika learners relate to educators but especially how BoT and SLT are in positions of influence to make changes to Pasefika learner outcomes. My lived experience as a NZ born Samoan, educated in mainstream schooling and having to traverse and understand two worlds, the NZ way of life and the *faa-Samoa* way of life. I am the eldest child of Puleimanufiu Taloolesa'agao Ta'itu'uga Tito Fuimaono Asafo (from Salani, Satalo, Sapunaoa - Samoa) and Miliama Asafo (nee Fa'amausili, from Malie, Safotu, Saipipi - Samoa). Born and raised in a household that welcomed and housed numerous family members who migrated to NZ during the 1980's and 1990's. I am the eldest of five and a mother of twins, I consider myself to be rich in all ways that matter most whilst on this temporary earth journey. I have witnessed the struggles and disconnection my own family experienced as they navigated my schooling years and now, as an educator, I continue to observe similar challenges faced by many Pasefika learners and their families, particularly in relation to engagement and the development of meaningful relationships within school contexts. Growing up I was fortunate and blessed to be raised by parents who valued education and yearned for us to be successful. My parents owned their own home, worked overtime as machinists, as an orderly, as a cleaner, and taxi drivers, who through consistent motivation managed to put all five of us kids through university and graduated in various disciplines; and were avid church goers at the Pacific Island Presbyterian Church (PIPC) Newton in Auckland. We weren't the smartest of kids, we just understood the role we had to play to honour our parents' hard work. My parents' interaction with our schools was minimal largely due to cultural barriers; lack of familiarity with the NZ education system and work schedules did not align. I take this time to acknowledge my parents who did their utmost best to provide us with all they could and with whatever they could. But although I was fortunate to have supportive parents, I also understand that not all Pasefika learners have access to this kind of support.

My initial research question was very broad in scope, however, through much reflection it was narrowed down, and the root of the issue became more obvious. Through my educational experiences I understood that having positive relationships were a key to success, especially between the learner and the teacher. I then became interested in understanding how leadership practices influence relational engagement within schools and I opted to look at a top-down impact, with the belief that what flows from the head will be replicated at the bottom, hence my decision to look at BoT and SLT strategic practices by using the *vā* to inform and guide them.

Numerous empirical research evidence (Airini et al., 2010; Atkinson, 2013; Bishop, 2019; Cooper et al., 2024, 2025; Douglas, 2025; Reynolds, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019; Spee et al., 2014; Taleni et al., 2017; Taleni & Surtees, 2024) consistently directs us to see the importance of building positive relationships as a pathway to equitable outcomes, particularly for marginalised and minority learners. Such approaches acknowledge the weight of being culturally inclusive, culturally appropriate and making efforts to be culturally sustaining, and position relational engagement as a core foundation to improving Pasefika learner outcomes.

For too long the achievement disparity for Pasefika learners in comparison to non-Pasefika learners has been over-represented in the lower end of New Zealand educational achievement statistics. Pasefika learners have been referred to as priority learners, target students and the literacy tail (Talení, 2023). Pasefika ontology looks at the nature of reality (Vaiotei, 2006) and how they interpret themselves in comparison to others (Ponton, 2018). This research looks at the reality of how the participants view the *vā* between themselves and how that is then utilised as a strengths-based strategy to support learners, families, colleagues and their communities. I have used the Talanoa methodology because the *vā* is fundamentally about relational space, and talanoa encourages participants to be engaged in a deeply relational, collaborative and open process of sharing knowledge (Vaiotei, 2006) thus allowing for authenticity, cultural appropriateness and openness (Matapo & Enari, 2021). My intention was to explore how the *vā* is a significant factor for learner success, but most importantly how this is enacted from a leadership perspective. Talanoa also acts as a form of narrative enquiry where it becomes a safe space for experiences to be shared and used to learn from with the aim to help solve community problems (Conn et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Within a Talanoa methodological approach, ontology is about revealing the nature of what is true (Vaiotei, 2006), meaningful and real from a Pacific worldview, particularly how Pasefika people see themselves in relation to others and to their world (Ponton, 2018). My research objective is to look at how school leadership interprets the Pacific framework of *teu le vā* to support Pasefika learners. This single site study draws on the Talanoa methodology because it looks beyond the surface

interview, but unpacks people's personal perspective and lived experience of what is true (Vaiotele, 2006) and in this context, how the vā is experienced by the participants in their own lived reality using a framework that makes sense of their world of Pasefika ways of doing and researching. Through talanoa, the collective sharing of perspectives is not individual but the relational emerges via deep and meaningful talanoa and mutual respect and acknowledgement of understanding.

Epistemologically, the Talanoa methodology is an example of how knowledge and ideas are shared, created and understood amongst Pasefika. There is no gate keeping of knowledge, because the common goal through open talanoa is a collective one, where if it benefits one, it will also benefit others (Conn et al., 2016; Vaiotele, 2006). The talanoa sessions in this case study are evidential of a shared common goal by the participants and their use of the vā, how leaders relate to one another and how this can be interpreted into strategies to improve Pasefika learner outcomes.

The Pacific research framework of Fa'afaletui looks at the multiple perspectives shared during the talanoa with participants and thus allows the weaving of various views reflective of co-design concepts that strengthens collective enquiry (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022). This framework derives from a Samoan philosophical frame of thinking about connectedness and collectivity with an emphasis of working together, which is part of the 'fa'a' (way of being) in Pasefika ways of life, but has been adopted as a Pacific research framework. It acknowledges Samoan values and how Samoans gain strength from working together. This framework was chosen because it involves collective inquiry where the perspectives of the participants are weaved together. When referring to weaving of perspectives it is a sacred art because it is about connection and the provision of protection and sustaining of cultural values (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022). In the Samoan culture, when the village women have their community weekly weaving activities, there is much preparation before the weaving takes place. The picking of the pandanus leaves, the cutting and removal of the spiky teeth off the leaves, the washing, the boiling, the drying out in the sun, the thinning out or stripping of the leaves, the colouring or bleaching, the rolling, the tying up of the leaves and then the fine cutting of the leaves into equal strands (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022). The finer, the softer, the thinner, the more versatile the strand is, the more value it holds, for when the woven strands make a complete fine mat that is gifted during special occasions. It is a sacred art form that is of high value once completed. The same goes with the orality weaving of participant talanoa and collective engagement of each person's insights and understanding of the vā (Mafile'o et al., 2024). The sharing and weaving of knowledge and lived experiences from different 'fale' (houses) seeks wisdom and acknowledges the differing perspectives (Mafile'o et al., 2024) thus forming transformative knowledge bases. Although this framework originates from Samoa, it is important to note that it reflects the shared cultural values of various Pacific societies. Core Pacific values such as relationships, communitarism, working as a collective (Tuia & Cobb, 2021) as opposed to alternative Western ontologies of individual forms of representation (Goodyear-Smith &

'Ofanoa, 2022) and individual ways of doing, of being and individual knowledge generation (Tuia & Cobb, 2021). One of the key differences is how the data are analysed when comparing Fa'afaletui and western ontologies. Within a Western ontology framework, focus group interviews seek to make sense of how individuals make sense within a group setting, in contrast to the Pacific ontology of Fa'afaletui that values the weaving of collective co-creation of knowledge which is reflective of the communal shared, holistic and interconnected worldview (Tuia & Cobb, 2021).

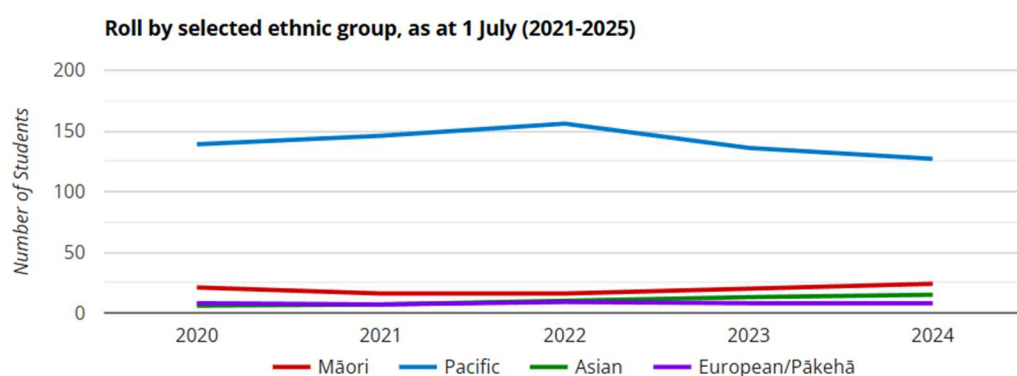
METHOD

Talanoa

The talanoa method was used as the primary tool to collect stories, perspectives, knowledge and to gather qualitative data, thus allowing for open, mutual and respectful conversations. Talanoa sessions were a minimum of 45 minutes and maximum of up to two hours. One talanoa was conducted face to face at the school and the rest of the talanoa sessions were done online via zoom.

My single site case study school was specifically chosen because they are a school that is embedded in Pasefika values, culture and pedagogies through a collective knowledge base of the Pasefika community they represent (families, staff, learners and community). The school chose to de-identify themselves, so in this study they are identified as CSS (Case study school). The Education Review Office (ERO) (2025) report showed positive outcomes for National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) with a large majority of students achieving Levels 2, 3 and University Entrance for CSS learners. The report also indicates that leaders are collaborative and culturally responsive with a clear focus on learner success, by building and sustaining high levels of relational trust. It also highlights that inclusive learning environments are organised and teachers know their learners well and respond to their individual strengths and learning needs.

Figure 3.1 Roll by selected ethnic group



In figure 3.1 the data reveals that the CSS school roll is predominantly made up of learners who identify as Pasefika.

Figure 3.2 School leavers with at least NCEA Level 1 or equivalent.

Group	Below NCEA level 1			NCEA level 1 or above			Percentage with NCEA level 1 or above		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
Female	6	3	3	13	9	14	68.4	75.0	82.4
Male	7	5	8	17	7	20	70.8	58.3	71.4
Māori	2	x	3	3	x	4	60.0	x	57.1
Pacific	13	7	8	27	15	31	67.5	68.2	79.5
Asian	x	0	x	x	0	x	x	na	x
MELAA	0	0	0	0	0	0	na	na	na
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	na	na	na
European/Pākehā	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Total	13	8	11	30	16	34	69.8	66.7	75.6

In figure 3.2 the data presented here is for school leavers with at least NCEA Level 1 or equivalent by gender and ethnic group (2022-2024)

Through a pre-established relationship with a mutual person who knew the Co-Principals, I was able to firstly make contact with the Co-Principals via email. I introduced myself, explained the purpose and nature of my study. My initial request on this email was to meet with either one or both of the Co-Principal, to see if they were interested in wanting to know more information and opt to participate in the research study. I initially met with one of the Co-Principals at the school grounds and further discussed my topic. The Co-Principal was happy to accommodate and offer their knowledge and experiences to the research. The Co-Principal signed the consent form for the researcher to access school staff and the BoT (see Appendix 4) and also signed the Talanoa group participation consent form (see Appendix 6). We then discussed who would participate, organised a day I could come back to the school to initiate the first talanoa session with the SLT and left with the Co-Principal the organisation and participation information sheets (see Appendix 1 and 2) and consent forms for individual Talanoa participation (see Appendix 3) to be shared to the possible participants. My next meeting involved myself and five members of their senior leadership team, and the talanoa took place on the school site. Organisational consent and participant consent forms were signed off with the request that the school would be de-identified. Participants were then given pseudo names for the talanoa session. Each participant voiced their interest in the research topic and felt it was a topic they could resonate and contribute to greatly in support of equitable Pasefika learner outcomes. This highlights the vā as a relational space, where there was mutual collective connectedness between participants thus making meaningful talanoa dialogue (Suaalii-Sauni, 2017).

Before conducting the talanoa session, I emphasised that my role was to hear about their experiences of the vā and that they were the knowledge holders and whatever they share in research is representative of their families and villages that raised them (Vaiioleti, 2013) and their own lived

experience and truth. With faith being an integral part of our Pasefika culture, our talanoa started off with prayer. We then introduced ourselves, our families and our villages; thus the relational vā was nurtured briefly through acknowledging each participant's family, cultural identity, background and their respective roles and achievements. Furthermore, I outlined the purpose and the heart behind the research, thus allowing for transparency and heart connection as to why their input and knowledge was valid and important to raising Pasefika learner outcomes. Before coming to the talanoa session, my talanoa session questions (see Appendix 6) were emailed to the Co-Principal so that the participants could view beforehand and prepare answers if needed. The talanoa questions were in-depth and open-ended. On arrival, due to this being my first time meeting the majority of the participants, I provided morning tea for the talanoa, in accordance with my Samoan cultural practices, where hospitality is demonstrated through the provision of food and drink when hosting or requesting time from others. It is a small token of appreciation for the time given thus reinforcing relational reciprocity (Poumale, 2017).

There were times during the talanoa, where participants needed prompts to better understand the question but there were also opportunities for participants and the researcher to reflect, challenge or request clarity on matters, which is in alignment with the dialogical and relational aspect of talanoa. Talanoa sessions were recorded via digital recording and the face to face one was done with an audio recording device. Digital and online recordings were transcribed, and transcripts were returned back to participants for review, allowing for them to approve, clarify or edit their contributions. This upheld the integrity and accuracy of participant perspective and voice. Then after all the talanoa sessions were completed, to acknowledge research participants' time and knowledge sharing through sentiments of gratitude and the provision of a koha. Throughout the talanoa process, Pacific values such as fa'aaloalo (respect), alofa (love), tautua (service), fetausia'i (reciprocity), fa'amaualalo (humility), vā fealoalo'ai (spaces between relational arrangements), vā tapuia (sacred space) were carefully observed (Airini et al., 2010). These values helped to sustain the talanoa as a safe, meaningful and culturally anchored space.

PARTICIPANTS

I deliberately choose an Auckland Secondary School that caters for Pasefika learners who uphold Pasefika values at the core by acknowledging the importance of Pasefika identity, culture, language pedagogies through the experiences and knowledge of their staff. As this is strengths-based research, this school was best aligned and could speak to the use of the framework of relational vā within leadership outlook for the school. The vā and its impact is a catalyst for learner success, hence the need to find participants of Pasefika heritage who simultaneously use the vā to guide decisions when leading a school. Through this participant selection, it ensures that participants can authentically engage in open talanoa, enabled by deep cultural and relational connectivity and

dialogue of shared and lived experiences (Vaiotei, 2006). When looking at the leadership, I chose to look at the school's governance - the BoT members and the SLT, as I wanted to see the vā interaction and relational aspect of their decision making and strategising for the school. I found that through these common factors, the relationships were in general very positive, intimate and nurturing between all the participants. Each had their own perspective and experience of the vā and how it is enacted in their decision making, and some were in agreement with the other when sharing their perspectives. There were nine participants in total and all identified themselves as majority Pasefika, which supported their active engagement in the talanoa process.

DATA COLLECTION

According to Conn et al. (2016), Talanoa allows for the participants and the researcher to be comfortable in themselves because it is a culturally safe place to be transparent, authentic (Vaiotei, 2006), and open to co-create knowledge (Matapo & Enari, 2021). Reciprocity of knowledge is at the heart of talanoa, which allows for participants and researchers to build long lasting, trustworthy and respectful relationships (Vaiotei, 2006).

Collecting the data took a while to gather due to hectic schooling calendar schedules for the SLT and a multitude of other commitments that the BoT members had to attend to. The time period stretched to approximately six months (April 2025 - End of October 2025). The BoT members meet once a month and they all have their own careers, families and extra-curricular activities, other meetings to attend on top of their roles as BoT members. Whereas the SLT meets once a week, but school life takes over and the snowball of busy-ness made it difficult to schedule time in.

The talanoa research questions (see Appendix 6) that were selected were open ended questions and were dependent on the flow of the interview, as not all questions had to be asked explicitly as responses could easily blur into the next sub-question. Data were collected in two formats, individual and group configuration. Two out of the five talanoa sessions conducted were in group talanoa format. One of these group talanoa sessions showed the participants responding about their own perspective and experiences; and if one answered a question, the other participants were free to challenge, agree or extend by sharing their own experiences. The other group talanoa session was done mostly as an observation on my end, where I actively observed talanoa in process (Vaiotei, 2014). When engaged in this deep, culturally grounded talanoa process, as a researcher I was able to focus on the essence and the wholeness of the experience. Partial observation enabled me to listen with intention and to interpret meaning on a deeper level by looking at the whole process of talanoa which included non-verbal cues, body language, facial expression, gestures and cultural contexts (Vaiotei, 2014). During these group formats I found the participants to be collegial and

would complement each other with their range of responses and would allow for each other to decide who would answer depending on the question asked.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND CODING

A majority of the talanoa sessions were held online via zoom call. Only one group session was done face to face and was recorded orally. The digital recording also had the ability to create the transcripts from each session which was then passed back to the participants for their approval. I was able to listen to the recordings, go through the transcripts and analyse them using a thematic approach. I read through the raw data a couple of times and then went back to highlight keywords, key ideas, key phrases and key concepts in the margins. I would then re-read the transcripts again and had two margins on the right, one for key ideas and key phrases and then the second margin I would write the keyword that was the main focus of that section of talanoa (see Appendix 7). I then wrote all the main keywords on a bigger piece of paper and began to categorise them according to relationships that linked key ones together (see Appendix 8). Once the themes were categorised, I then looked at how often the themes were mentioned in the transcripts and that helped to form the three main themes. The rest of the themes were categorised as sub themes and were placed in their relatedness to one of the three main themes.

CHAPTER 4 - DATA & FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines a summary of the data and findings from the talanoa sessions with the school leadership, highlighting their own perspective on how the vā is experienced and enacted to inform leadership strategies to support equitable Pasefika learner outcomes.

Talanoa was used as it allowed for the personal sharing of participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Eldridge, 2018). In addition, it supported the co-construction of meanings through conversation (Clandinin et al., 2006, cited in Matapo & Enari, 2021). Furthermore, talanoa is a culturally grounded, relational methodology that enacts the vā through mutual understanding, transparency and trust, which creates a safe space for participants to share stories, lived experiences and knowledge (Matapo & Enari, 2021). The perspectives and inner stories that are shared from the heart by participants during the talanoa sessions are then weaved into a collective consensus of knowledge and understanding. This weaving and gathering of knowledge creates connectivity and a mutual understanding between participants. This is known as the Fa'afaletui method, a Pasefika framework which values the individual perspectives that are shared and allows for diverse voices that prioritises connectedness, spirituality and cultural protocols (acknowledgement of the vā) to come together through the weaving of knowledge.

There were nine participants who were split into two groups, the BoT group and the SLT group. The BoT group had two talanoa sessions, one group session which was two hours long with five participants and one talanoa session with an individual BoT member. The SLT group had five participants that were able to come together for the group talanoa session, and then individuals from the SLT carried out the last two talanoa sessions. Four out of the five talanoa sessions ranged from 45 minutes to an hour. See table 4.1 for those who participated in the case study.

Table 4:1 Case study school leadership participants

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PARTICIPANTS			
PARTICIPANT	GENDER	ETHNICITY	LEADERSHIP ROLE
SLT 1	Male	Samoan, Maori	SLT
SLT 2	Female	Maori	Co-Principal
SLT 3	Male	Fijian	SLT
SLT 4	Male	Samoan	Co-Principal
SLT 5	Female	Samoan	Office Manager
SLT 6	Male	Samoan	SLT
BOT 1	Male	Samoan	BOT Chairperson
BOT 2	Female	Maori, Samoan, European	BOT member
BOT 3	Male	Cook Islander	BOT member
BOT 4	Female	Maori	Co-Principal
BOT 5	Male	Samoan	Co-Principal

RELATIONAL VĀ

The importance of being relational is the main theme that has been echoed in this case study. Relationships between the BoT and SLT are foundational in their coming together as change agents for improved learner outcomes. The BoT consists of the two co-principals, business owners and leaders within the community who are well-regarded for their professional roles and strong reputations. The SLT consists of the two co-principals, senior teachers and the school's office manager. The age range across all participants are from mid-20's up to early 60's. The Board experience is varied in the team, some who serve on other boards and have notable financial, decision-making strengths, but what is noticeable is the respect for each other and the space each one holds for one another. Throughout the leadership team it is evident there is a shared vision and understanding that the focus is the learner which also includes the family and the community the learners represent. Their individual understanding of the vā is multi-dimensional, deep, complex, experiential, cultural and entangled, universal but ultimately the vā is seen as the foundational catalyst for learner success.

'... it's so vast and I think even we as Pasefika downplay how massive it is ... like how we understand, you know, the vā feiloa'i (relational space) this dictates this and that ... but actually a huge part of how we understand how everything operates around us ... even as an adult, you're still ... can't quite find the exact words to explain how important it is' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

The vā has a spiritual concept as it is about the in-betweenness, the unseen that dictates relationships and how each person relates to each other. The CSS BoT and SLT meet and open up their meetings with prayer as they are a faith-based school. Their regard of the vā relates to a spiritual protection or guide for the relationships they encounter.

‘... but a huge part of our experience of the vā and how we use it is through prayer. Prayer and transparency like we’re at this table here. This needs to be the most transparent table out of all the tables ... but it’s only because of that transparency and that ability to take things to each other and take things to God. There we can see shifts not just in the program, but in the spirit of this place’ (SLT GROUP 1, Participant S1).

The vā is practiced amongst the leadership relationships, with both groups, there is a hearty sharing of check in or catchups before each of the formal talanoa sessions. Inquiries are made into each other's lives and how life is going.

‘We will make a start. How have you been, B2? Busy day, huh’ (BoT Group 1, participant B1).

‘Good. Yeah, I think I might have told someone I had a hui at the kura’ (BoT Group 1, participant B2).

There are references made as ‘sis’ (one of the male BoT participants addressing a female BoT member as a sister) and light-hearted banter. Connections were made with me as the PR, by asking about my background, my villages, my parents, family and what drives me to do this study. Connections are made also via speaking my mother tongue in my introduction and some of the participants responding in the same mother tongue, this eases the nerves in the talanoa session on both sides. Apologies are given in the meeting from a BoT member who could not be present, but there is acknowledgement of their spiritual covering and blessing for the meeting. Positive affirmations are made as each BoT member introduces themselves. The vā is also tangible within CSS and explicitly acknowledged through cultural and spiritual practices.

‘The vā is a very tangible thing here at CSS. It’s addressed all the time ... the first touch they get with it is at an interview with me ... I’ll ask the child to do a lotu (prayer) ... and the response right there tells me a lot about the home life... it tells me a lot about their vā with their parents ... I acknowledge them for the courage to fill that space ... Then I’ll break it down to them what it actually means to me and what I’ve seen in the first minute of our getting together’ (BoT 3, participant B5).

There is a shared vision within the BoT in the valuing of their teachers. Whilst talking about the decrease in funding from MoE, there was acknowledgement from the BoT for the principal in having to make financial reductions to cope with the challenges around expenses and how long they could maintain this for. The BoT member went on to voice that despite the financial deficit they will not compromise the importance of the main resource - their teachers.

'... for us as trustees to make sure that we maintain that quality that we just talked about. And to maintain that quality, we need the right teachers at the right pay levels. We've got to look after our number one, which is our human resources, who teach day in, day out. So that's a challenge for us to make sure that we're constantly investing in them' (BoT Group 1, participant B3).

'... we made a conscious decision as a board and as an established group. We don't want to be flashy on the outside and no substance on the inside ... we've worked hard for 3-4 years to develop the substance of what we're doing. And all of it has come, I'm proud to say, from kids who are broken, marginalised, kicked out and deemed of no use to their family or to the system. They're the ones we learned from, about why they're like that and what they need in order to come back into society and operate as an asset rather than a burden' (BoT 2, participant B5).

Traditional 'elder' respect is prevalent with S1 mentioning that respecting those in the team that are 'elders' and S2 acknowledging that although they are co-principals respect is given to other SLT members that are older and have experience which provides a safe space to share frustrations, be vulnerable and transparent. It is not a top-down hierarchical order of roles, but it structurally recognises the vā having multiple relational spaces and relational type structure. Multiple vā spaces such as the vā between BoT and SLT; the vā between the more experienced and the less experienced; the vā between male and female, the vā between those who are older and have lived experience are highly valued in the SLT; the vā between teachers and students; the fa'a-matai va; the vā between school and family; the vā between the school family and the community.

'I'm a SLT ... you know like being on the younger side as far as staff is concerned, it's really like - you know I think I often struggled at the start because my mindset was so entrenched in - who is this little ... coming in here leading us ... this goes back to how the vā influences the way that you lead ...' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

'As an example, we have Auntie ... she's 83 ... for me I look up to Auntie S5, you know ... I don't consider myself to be the boss, ... because actually everyone else around me shapes that ... those kinds of colleagues or mamas are really pivotal in my leadership because they

ground me and they keep me safe ... for Auntie S5 she can sit me down anytime she needs to and give me a good telling off ... but it's needed ... for my leadership to ensure that I am leading in a way that's keeping others safe ... it comes down to that building on that relationship and building that trust.' (SLT Group 1, participant S2).

The vā is also evidential via the respect for boundaries and the space each holds for themselves and one another. The SLT do regular check-ins on each other about their wellbeing and their lives at home. There is an expectation that being a staff member of the school requires you to bring all of you, 'ava tu, ava mai' (give and receive); 'bring all of themselves' because it essentially means that

'they bring all of themselves that means their love life, their everything comes to school with them' (SLT Group 1, participant S4).

Relational vā is enacted by SLT intentionally greeting their learners at the gate every morning. There is a belief that some of their learners do not have the luxury of getting 'hugs' or 'greetings' by families at home for various reasons, thus creating emotional safety so that each learner feels seen and valued.

'Because standing at the gate, greeting kids in the morning is so much more than just standing at the gate and meeting kids in the morning. For somebody you know ... you've got kids with no mums, they get their hugs' (SLT Group 1, participant S4).

An example of relational vā between child and adult using the description of when students are playing a game outside and there is swearing involved. The 'aunty' (teacher) growls at them, the learner answers them back and then the student is sent to the Principal. The principal teaches them the school expectation that students do not answer back, and proceeds to instruct them;

'on your way back to class, knock on the door, don't enter the room, sit at the entrance of the room and say 'Aunty I just want to say it wasn't me who was swearing up there' (SLT Group 1, participant S4).

and the Aunty says it's ok and to go back to class. This is an exemplar of 'mowing the grass between them' (SLT Group 1, participant S4) a tangible and practical exemplar of what tidying things up look like.

'... we've seen it time and time again where teachers develop empathy and an affinity for their kids. And then the kid just drops all the guards and becomes brainy. That's the magic that we have to get from the vā because ... I mean I totally believe in it. I totally believe that that's

what it takes for a child with ... for them to access their academic cognitive, optimal performance, they need to feel safe and our management of the vā is the magic today' (SLT Group 1, participant S4).

The vā is constantly displayed, actioned, and explicitly taught to learners as a way of engaging in positive relationships. At the initial enrolment interview for a learner, expectations of respect are explicitly voiced; respect is not earned but a give in, in order for a relationship to flourish and be sustainable.

'On site, there's adults and there's children. The vā between this is operated under fa'aaloalo (respect). We don't earn respect here ... respect is automatic for adults and children and then the job of the young people is to manage that vā' (BOT Group 3, participant B5).

CONNECTIVITY

Another key finding of how leaders foster the vā is maintaining relationships and communication with learners' families by getting involved and active. If the vā has been built, parents feel strong enough to come into the school to seek advice. S3 shared what it was like at other schools they had taught at:

'My old school I walk in, teach, walk out. That's done ... and that is something I don't see here ... other schools I just walk in - teach, when it's time to go, I don't need to know you' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

'The main connection for us is the home - getting the parents more involved in what we are doing or active in what we are trying to do ... so they'll come in, then we can work with them in assisting their child at home. I think the va is very important, because it allows for parents to come in' (SLT Group 1, participant S3).

Connectivity is a way of life for Pasefika families, it's how it has always been. Connecting with your family comes naturally for Pasifika learners as they are raised around not just their nuclear family but extended family and friends that become family (eg: church family, sports family). So, it is important for learners to feel connected to their teachers and school life families.

'When we live, when we're existing, not as a like one, like isolated, you gain an appreciation and an understanding on a really deep level for the ones, for the people around you, because it's no longer just me ... too often people are trying to live in isolation and we're not made to live like that. It doesn't work like um, especially our people ... we've lived for so long in the

community and you know, our village, our family, our churches, like that's why they're so important to us ... that's what I really believe the vā teaches us is that, all of these things around us are holistic, all different things, all the different parts, they're important to how we ... how we operate, how we live ... (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

'When the relationship with home - is on, like you see that child flourish because they're held accountable at every point. They come here, ... they know the expectation, I know what's happening at home ... if something is out of balance ... we know and we triangulate ... like parents to the teacher, the teacher to the and so on The child is at the middle there and we're intentional with how we engage. Really intentional ...' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

Participant S3 continues to say the same is with the relationships within the staff, as the previous schools they taught at, they didn't worry about what their colleagues were going through, but at CSS it is different.

'Yeah, I'm just here to teach - and the same thing goes for relationships within the staff. You know, we don't really worry about what you're going through. If you are going through something make your way to the counsellor and sort yourself out. You know, it's not my business here to look after you' (SLT Group 1, participant S3).

SLT check in on each other's wellbeing, family life and how things are going on in general. The relational vā is evident with learners and staff, and learners can see that when they are being valued, they are more likely to seek help from their teachers.

LEADERSHIP AS TEU LE VĀ

Another key theme that is evident in this case study is how the leadership actively teu le vā and expect this of their teachers and students. S3 speaks fondly of the co-principals and the humility that guides them as leaders to be relational, transparent, inclusive of their SLT team when in the process of decision making.

'... but I think that's what I like about this school because the principals are very open, they know when they need advice ... they know when they need help ... they are so down to earth, it's a different feeling working with them. They're so receptive to advice and they don't just up and make decisions. They wait for us ... we'll sit down and then they make an informed decision ... And I think that's why they've been successful all this time' (SLT Group 3, participant S3).

'... so it's really e iloa le tautai i long filiga, you know, you sort of know the navigator by their choices. So like if it's a rough sea, they will choose a different sail' (SLT Group 1, participant S4).

RELATIONAL TRUST

Relational trust is a foundational element of the vā. Critical to establishing a strong leadership team is the practice of establishing trust between the team, as it is also a catalyst of success not only to the leadership team itself, but also for those they are accountable to. Trust is nurtured through the enactment of cultural values of love, respect and reciprocity, which creates a safe and family orientated vā.

'It's the same for how this group (SLT) operates under the BoT is that their trust in our alofa (love) towards this group and the hopes for allocations of funds and the direction for where we want to take our kids, their trust is high and their expectations are high too ... we're so blessed to have a board like that. That hears what the needs are, but also what the desires are, like we don't work only from a needs base' (SLT Group 1, participant S1).

'Yeah and out of that this is the ripple effect ... We are blessed to sit under that board and witness their leadership, their relationship, the vā that they have for each other as well as their vā towards our co-principals, our staff ...' (SLT Group 1, participant S5).

'... you need to have a relationship and connection. We already know that because we say it all day for the kids. Relationship connection before you do. The same is true for your colleagues. The same is true for the people you lead ... if you understand how the vā works, it's not just you do it because I say ... And so, what I thought, honestly, what I thought initially was a burden. I was like, man, the vā, I got to be respectful because they're like, could be my nanas ... when I was able to unpack it with them and say - being honest, this is where I'm at ... and that word there, you would say vulnerability, being vulnerable. If I didn't have an understanding, but also if the people on the other side didn't have an understanding of the vā there, it would be a lot harder to have that conversation' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

'The concept of vā speaks to a lot of things. It speaks to trust ... so when you're able to build relationships with your students, it doesn't really have to be Pacific only, relationships in vā is a universal thing. (SLT Group 3, participant S3).

The BoT trusts that their SLT will always put the learner and their safety first. Sometimes SLT makes a call, gets things done and then tells the BoT after eg: supporting a family with their rent, because child safety is paramount. SLT decided then actioned it and advised the BoT at the next meeting.

'... heard in the kids' voice that it's getting scary here (home). There's been some big fights. Money's gone and our rent, we don't have any money for rent and the landlord is you know ... straight away to us - this kid can't learn, this kid is not safe and that is our responsibility. Our board didn't even blink an eyelid. They just said 'oh fa'afetai lava (thank you very much)' (BoT 2, participant B5).

'If people were able to actually do a study of who is on our board and what skills they bring, oh , then they would get a deep understanding of what we're doing month in, month out ... what was that gagana Samoa 'la malu lou sa, folau lagi ma' (a well-grounded self, is a successful self) and that is exactly what we experience here. E malu le matou sa, e matou te folau i lagi ma, we get to sail in blue skies because we're so well covered - professionally, culturally, spiritually, they touch on those points ... If we spend money on a family for their rent, they say thank you. And then they say, OK, are they booked into Whanau Ora (social service support) do they have the service? Do they have food bank access? And so they not only show their hearts, but they then apply the professional stewardship that is expected of us because the child is unsafe ... yeah, and that's good enough for them to justify' (SLT Group 1, participant S4).

Another leadership strategy that showcases the vā, is the SLT setting high expectations, not only for their learners but also the learners' families.

'I've been able to meet and build relationships with those kids who were like real hard cases and those families ... It was like multiple families within the school, you know gang ties, ... absent family... the kids weren't even at home ... And so I think in the beginning they had to really lay a really firm foundation on the expectations of if you're going to be here, ... You know, like the space is made for them. But you as a family, if you're going to be here, our expectation as a school is this - that we are engaged in our kids' learning and that we make sure they're turning up on time. We do everything in our power to make sure' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

STEWARDSHIP

Another finding of how the BoT and SLT understand and experience the vā is through stewardship, as demonstrated in this case of school allocation of funds. SLT do not have a monetary value

attached to budgets as such, because they believe that if a certain budget is given for a department, there is a risk of the budget being used unnecessarily; for example, funds being used just because the budget is there. Rather SLT supports any initiative their team or staff feel needs to be invested in. The only expectation is to ensure that they do their homework (costs, quotes etc) and present these.

'S2 if you really need something, you just go and do our homework, bring it back, and then we'll take that. They never say this is the limit. It's actually a really great example of stewardship ... it's duplicated all the way down through the organisation.' (SLT Group 1, participant S2).

Stewardship has been at the heart of the beginning of this school. It isn't just a school, but one that was envisioned as a dream to answered prayers and to still have the impact to steward and support the school is meaningful and purposeful to them.

'... I just love what the school does and what it represents and you know, you just wish we had a school like this when we were young' (BoT Group 1, participant B3).

"We're very passionate about this mahi (work), and that's why we've been here for nearly 11 years doing this since the inception, and we all dreamed this up, so we're privileged to be living the dream' (BoT Group 1, participant B1).

Stewardship is also seen as looking after your staff wellbeing and when in times of hardship. The BoT acknowledged the passing of a staff member's father. The SLT shared that they had gone over to see the staff member and the family to pass on their condolences and they also gave a donation. In correlation to practicing Pasefika cultural tradition of gift giving for the bereaved family. This is what a traditional Samoan would do to show support for the grieving person or family. An envelope (teutusi) with monetary donations to help with the financial cost of the funeral is gifted to the grieving family. It is important to note that this has also been a pre-determined allotment of money as it is now a policy in place should there be a passing of a loved one within the staff at CSS.

'We went this morning' (B4)

'Oh ok' (B1)

'She sends the board blessings and well, thank you. She was very, very moved and we took a teutusi (envelope) ... we have a policy ... We don't, not at this level. We don't put this much unless it is the actual staff member' (BoT Group 1, participant B4).

The school has a policy of eliminating any possible barriers to learning using the concept of vā. Schooling is no longer transactional, and it shifts from deficit thinking to solutions that focus on nurturing a learner's holistic wellbeing and ensuring the learner is equipped for success and one of their first priorities is ensuring that the school provides free meals for their learners.

'... I think that what the board's really good at is - making us feel like we know that we never lack from nothing ... They ensure that we never feel like we can't do anything ... But also they have a real high expectation on the stewardship part.' (SLT Group 1, participant S2)

'... the hope is in everything that we do here at CSS that not just one of those pou's (pillars) are strengthened, all of them are, you know, the hope is in the heart of the board is that, no, we're going to try our best to remove these barriers, right? So that they're not ... there's nothing stopping you. And when there is, we want to work with you, not to get rid of it, but to overcome that' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

Sometimes there is not enough funds allocated to cover food for students specifically due to funding cuts and reallocation of funds, but they go into a massive deficit, and the BoT encourages SLT to practice what they believe in, so SLT carry on, there is no stress as the team as they are able to delve into any backup budgets they have available. There is a shared understanding that this is part of their stewardship towards learners and with a continued focus on the school vision, the BoT takes steps to ensure that SLT are well covered (SLT Group 1, participant S2).

'But the board is set up so that we pay for uniforms. All our trips we do are usually free. All the learning experiences they go on, we don't ask for money for camps or anything like that. It's all free. We were feeding the kids before the government started feeding. And laptops, stationary, everything's free' (BoT 2, participant B5).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community is part and parcel of a learner's success. CSS is in a heavily Pasefika populated area that is a low-socio economic environment. Leadership knows the importance of engaging with the community because this is the learners real-lived experience once school is over. The heart behind connecting with the community is to ensure that the learner has a safe after-school environment and CSS are actively engaged within their community.

'I think first off is knowing the community ... it's so important that we know the story of our community ... but we know where it comes from and we know the aspirations ... I know the baseline data of our community ... this flag waving that people are doing (parades), riding on

cars and all of that ... Anybody can do that, but what our grandparents came and did, very few can ... and it's showing now, very few are able to be resilient ... about how that generation that came and laid down the baseline ... It's scary because a lot of the new parents, young parents, they don't have that ... but you got to know the community, then you will know the direction we need to go in' (BoT 2, participant B5).

'... there's some really hardcore kids and so often those community events were just kind of siloed for the safety ... In the last few years I think that we've been able to, we've gotten to a place as a school where we feel safe enough that our kids have a really good relationship with the community and vice versa that we've been inviting our community in' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

The SLT realised that before they could go out in the community a deep work needed to be done first with the learners and their families. Learners needed to feel safe in their community first before the school reached out to the community.

'... honestly, it really was a place of poor, ... the community didn't really know how to live in relationship with each other, because we have, you know. There were the kids of opposite gangs sitting in these classes together. But again, ... the board and all the original teachers ... they were just hard out. How did you guys do it - Prayer. Yeah, and they stand on that, like it was really prayerful about it.' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

'I think the community plays a big part in the strategic running of the school. We depend a lot on community feedback ... we have language weeks ... at the end of the week we have parents come into the school ... They give feedback about how the school programmes are running, how they envision things to be run, and how the school can incorporate their learnings using Tongan context for student learning.' (SLT Group 3, participant S3).

The BoT acknowledges that working together with other schools in their area builds their capacity to network with one another and to learn from each other. This collective community work empowers the schools in the Kahui Ako to work towards better outcomes for their learners.

'... so through the Kahui Ako relationships ... She has really come a long way with all of us colleagues together, you know, doing the mahi together ... a transformational part of her journey that's changed her life ... is going to Tonga with B5 on that training' (BoT Group 1, participant B4).

The transformational change in this teacher's life was being able to participate in a trip to an indigenous country, and it shows the importance of being in the present and adding to your lived experiences by seeing the challenges first hand in a native country.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

The leadership looked at strategies to improve the attendance of learners, and more effort is needed to encourage families to send their children to school. The SLT are aware of learners that are classed as chronically absent and have followed them up and there are a variety of reasons, with many being medical and this is a huge problem for many of the schools in their area. A strong monitoring system is being put in place to ensure the upkeep of communications between the school and families. But the school is placed in a low socio-economic area, so the attendance data is the same for all the other schools in the area. The encouragement from the BoT is to keep pushing and keep up the good work with attendance, as the MoE acknowledges there has been an increase in attendance.

'... there were so many flus this year ... and then of course for our kids, you know, with our housing and our poverty that we come from' (BoT Group 1, participant B4).

'... you know, even though we're getting the toughest kids, we are always wanting the very best and we're aiming for the highest outcomes and the best, the very best for them' (BoT Group 1, participant B1).

CULTURAL CAPITAL

The leadership team all have ancestral links to the Pacific islands and understand the village concept where relationships between learners, parents, teachers and community are important. Cultural values are both acknowledged and embodied by the leadership team in their expectations for their staff, learners and families. Efforts to connect with learner families through regular school events and

'I'd be surprised if there's a teacher here who does not know a lot about their kids and their families ... we have families that just rock on up and have a coffee ... also Talanoa ako, it's creating spaces where they can come , where - we talk , so we have every Tuesday ... we meet with families ... they turn on, turn up nonstop ... this is another avenue for building relationships with them ... They connect with their teachers really, really well' (SLT Group 1, participant S5).

The BoT acknowledged the passing of a staff member's father and were appreciative that the SLT had stepped in and made a monetary gift to the bereaved family, to ease the burden of the financial costs for the funeral. The SLT also advised that they had a policy regarding gift giving for funerals that were in direct relation to the staff. This shows that there are cultural protocols in play and SLT has the backing of the BoT should it be required.

'We have so many funerals and tangis and it's just part of being a Pacific Islander, being Maori, having big villages and networks' (BoT Group 1, participant B1).

The vā is strengthened from the beginning of the year, with the parent body having access to nearly all of the SLT during the whole of Term 1, up to 10 weeks on every Tuesday evening. The consensus is that the students of these parents who attend the Tuesday meetups with SLT, do well at school (SLT Group 1, participant S4).

Another SLT strategy that is used to build the relational vā, is upon a learner enrolment, SLT expects the whanau to also attend the interview to have a talanoa. During this time a 'feagaiga' (relational unity, marriage) is built by leading the fono (meeting) with Pasefika values of alofa (love), tautua (service) and fa'aaloalo (respect). It is through these values that the connection is made straight away and thus a feagaiga is created with the understanding that should there be any concerns in the future, SLT will take it back to the feagaiga that was established with the families (SLT Group 1, participant S2).

DEFICIT THEORISING

A key factor for learning disparities was deficit theorising of Pasifika learners. These assumptions and biases would dictate the quality of teacher practice. CSS focuses on the strengths of learners by building capability, empowering them and approaching learners with positive affirmations.

'... we just celebrated our 10th year ... sitting there with the OG's (original teachers) and they're saying to me that these kids don't look anything like I remember us looking like ... a lot of them are brilliant, and I said the vast majority of them are brilliant. As so we as a community have learned and have grown, the board and the co-principals have slowly opened up these things where it's like, ok, now we've shown we can breathe in and out as a community. We can run events, we can do these things' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

'They do not believe when Tama says, I'm telling you, I had kids running up and down the street with, you know 2x4 and smashing things up at the bus stop and our kids don't believe

it because it's such a world away from their reality now, you know?' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

Deficit theorising doesn't only just occur from an educator's perspective, but it is about teaching the community that their deficit outlook on a Pasefika school means they are also not believing that Pasefika are not good enough. A new Pasifika school opened in the same region, and it shows the collegiality the BoT have in believing this is good for our people. They do not view the school as a threat to their own enrolments but believe that our Pasefika people need more schools catered for them. However, the issue then arises in changing some mindsets around Pasefika schools and what they have to offer.

'... we just heard of them ... on the news last night ... we believe that actually it's a good outcome ... and we think it's great for our people. I guess I think that the biggest battles really still are our parents not believing that we can deliver a high quality education because we're Pacific. I mean, B5 you faced that kind of audience last night and when you're going out to schools, that is what they truly think' (BoT Group 1, participant B4).

The school are aware of this deficit theorising within their own community of Pasefika families, where they themselves look down at the school because of its Pasefika stance and instead send their child off to a mainstream school. At enrolment, this is addressed and it is expressed that the school wants the learner to flourish as a Pasefika learner and emphasizes that their cultural identity is their superpower.

'And they come and fia kiwi (want to be kiwi). And so I sussed it out really quickly at the interview and I said to them, look, this is not a kiwi school. If you're wanting your kids to turn into the best Kiwi Weetbix kids ... you're not going to get it here. You may as well go the guy up the road ... I want your kids to come here and be the best Tongan, the best Tuvaluan, the best Samoan, the best Niuean, and we're going to do it as ourselves' (BoT 2, participant B5).

CURRICULUM AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

According to S3, curriculum adaptations were made. When S3 arrived at the school, the school were offering some of their classes via Te Kura (correspondence learning) and now they don't. Teachers were trained up to take these classes and worked hard to remove the stigma of being Pasifika (deficit theorising), and claims that without the vā that was built in the school every day, students were able to see this and it empowered them to take up these new subjects.

'... the vā that we had built with the students really informed the approach we take. For example, ... adding on new subjects ... So now we have physics, ... we have calculus and if the vā or the relationship of trust did not exist with the students then I don't think we would have been able to make these decisions to bring this new initiative ... If you didn't have that relationship with the kids, you would not even know if they have the ability to take them on' (SLT Group 3, page 2, participant S3).

'There's a big shift in mentality and a big shift in student's thinking and ideas of what success looks like, for us being Pasifika' (SLT Group 3, participant S3).

In addition, another strategy employed by leadership to strengthen the relational vā is connecting the curriculum learning to the identity and culture of the learner.

'... it takes you back to some work we had done with my Year 10s ... we were looking into the cultural practice of ifoga (Samoan traditional act of forgiveness) ... I think in and around that time was when the NZ Labour Party had done the ifoga, the Dawn raids thing. So we started unpacking that a bit ... one of my kids pointed out to me, which is really profound, but he said, ... Ifoga ..' people can look at it as, getting even or you can look at it as being in balance ... come back to the vā, like if there's ever an imbalance in your relationship with someone, you feel it eh? You feel, you, your colleague, between you and your colleague ... it's out of balance ... What does vā mean to you and how important it is, it's really important because it influences so much of how I connect and how I relate' (SLT Group 2, participant S6).

The school also has trips overseas to help learners engage with indigenous people and to promote cultural connections. They have had other trips in previous years, but they are planning a trip to Tahiti in the following year.

'We met with a couple from Tahiti last night. They came into school ... they reached out and we spoke ... She's a lecturer indigenous Tahiti language lecturer and ... she wanted to just see who we were and what we were about before she opened up about cultural connections' (BoT Group 1, participant B4).

The balancing of having the right curriculum subjects available to the needs and the aspirations of the learners is acknowledged by the BoT. In the past, CSS offered some of their subjects via Te Kura correspondence schooling. As of late, there has been a massive push to upskill teachers to not only teach their preferred subject but to also consider another subject to teach.

'Also part of the balance is having the right, the correct specialised subjects in front of kids ... that is definitely a balancing act and we have pushed for teachers to broaden their scope a bit more, which we can see that teachers are now at least teaching two different subjects' (BoT Group 1, participant B4).

THE VĀ BETWEEN THE STAFF

Some of the SLT members are not teachers by qualification but are part of the SLT because of the mana (strength) they carry in terms of cultural and relational capital through their lived experiences.

'It's a massive part of our success formula here. The vā between staff, the vā between students, the vā between others. I've got staff here who have no degrees, but who are leadership ... when I'm offsite ... they run the school and people with Masters of higher education have questioned that and the answer is fa'atina. They carry the fa'atina capital, cultural capital and we trust them to oversee the whole school ... and the board acknowledges that in payments as well' (BoT 2, participant B5).

'We had a counsellor join us ... came with a counselling degree ... throughout the term we were writing our pedagogies and then it became evident we were using a lot of their material, and it was all based on fa'a matai (chiefly ways of doing things). They are an active Matai (chief) in their village and they are an Ali'i (high chief) and they were willing to share this technology, our ancestral intelligence. Their ancestral intelligence was massive. And so, we met later in the term. They became part of leadership, their pay was elevated, their status at school was elevated ... it's a real different value base, ... we don't have to explain to our board. They get it. And because we have appropriated a lot of their information, life experiences and cultural capital massively' (BoT 2, participant B5).

It is also important to note that the structure of the school on the website has familial terms attached to the traditional roles of Principal and teachers. The Co-Principals are referred to as Tamā and Tinā (father and mother) and the teachers and support staff are labelled as aunties and uncles. This creates a family like atmosphere, and it acknowledges the Pasefika village that supports the learner in their educational journey.

SUMMARY

The data and findings of this single site case study were generated from the Talanoa group and individual sessions. Keywords were sought and then grouped into three main themes and sub themes. The first main theme is the relational vā, which reiterates that being relational,

acknowledging and understanding the vā is key to the success of Pasefika learner outcomes. Sub themes that supported the relational vā were for BoT and SLT to have a shared vision. It also saw the importance of actively building the vā which is evident in how the BoT did check-ins with their team to see how life was, which shows genuine care for each other. The role of the vā when a younger leader needs to understand not only their personal and traditional vā; but also balance it out with the professional vā. The SLT actively builds the vā through the greeting of learners at the gate and edifying the practice of the ifoga 'by mowing the grass' between the teacher and the learner. The active building in the vā can only be assisted if there is connectivity between all who are stakeholders for the learners' success. The triangulation between BoT, SLT, teacher, learner, family and community; makes for a strong support system for equitable outcomes for the learner.

The second theme was leadership as teu le vā. This implies that the BoT and SLT need to always be aware and actively teu le vā and it is evident in the trust that the BoT have of the SLT in their decision-making process empowers the SLT to make decisions so long as its focus is the learner and their wellbeing. The setting of high expectations not only for learners but also accountability amongst the BoT, SLT and staff. Stewardship is another example of how to teu le vā from a leadership perspective. This is evident in how funds are allocated in terms of department budgets where the SLT encourages their staff that there is no figure on the budget, but if it is required then do the due diligence and request for a time to discuss. The elimination of barriers for learners and ridding the community of any deficit theorising about a Pasefika school or of their learners is also another way in how the BoT and SLT display how they actively teu le vā. All of these exemplars of teu'ing le vā show that the vā needs constant attending to because it is always evolving.

The last theme looks at cultural capital and the importance of cultural values, family like relationships, the need for teacher practice and the curriculum to be culturally inclusive by acknowledging Pasefika learners' culture, language and identity. All these themes combined are how the BoT and SLT use the vā to shape their leading of CSS and most importantly to enhance Pasefika learner outcomes for the betterment of their families and community.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses the key findings that have been identified from the findings outlined in the previous chapter, while also weaving and addressing the research questions. The structure of this discussion is informed by the findings from Chapter Four and their connection to the literature from Chapter Two. The main themes that have been identified in the findings are the importance of the relational vā; leadership as teu le vā and cultural capital, with sub-themes emerging from each of these areas. These themes and sub-themes create the structure of this chapter's discussion and the connection between the literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the perspectives of the participants in Chapter Four.

THE VĀ MATTERS

Firstly, we acknowledge that the vā exists and therefore needs to be actively nurtured. The vā matters because the research shows that students flourish when relationships are affirmed as sacred, valued and have a place of belonging. Such relationships are the key to unlocking the potential within our Pasefika learners. Research shows that the vā through a Western perspective is seen as an empty space, whereas within a Pasefika worldview it is understood as relational and embedded with meaning. The vā is the inbetweenness, it is encompassing of all things, complex and multi-layered. The same goes with relationships between the BoT and SLT of the school. The BoT focuses on governance and operational duties whereas the SLT prioritises the managing and the day-to-day running of the school. Each has their own distinct roles and responsibilities but must work collaboratively with transparency, trust and respect for the school to function at its best.

RELATIONAL VĀ

One of the main catalysts for success of Pasefika learners is strongly linked to the foundational concept of the relational vā which is evident in the findings. It is through the nurturing of these relationships with genuine care, mutual respect, authentic connections and positive affirmations that cultivates a shared vision by all participants. The findings show that both the BoT and SLT show a genuine care towards one another by always checking-in to see how each other are doing, not only in their professional life but also in their personal lives. These light-hearted moments of sharing and genuine inquisitions of how life is going, shows strength in their value of each other, not just on a professional level with their respective roles within the team, but as individuals and what they bring to the group. Their interactions show relationships built over time, also keeping in mind that the BoT

only meet once a month during the school year. According to Anae (2010) *teu le vā* is about valuing, nurturing, looking after, cherishing the relationship, the *vā*. The referral of a BoT member to another BoT member as 'sis' (sister) shows the closeness of their working relationship and how it supersedes a professional level but one that reflects a familial connection.

An additional insight highlights that the relational *vā* has multiple and complex layers, it is not one-directional, non-structural, but dependent on the relationships formed. It is also reciprocal and can occur in the space naturally. Some of the SLT members are younger than others, and they had to learn to relate to one another on a professional level, where the cultural *vā* of respect for elders' mentality challenged one leader who struggled because of this cultural mindset. The *vā* influenced the way they made decisions and how they interacted with the other leaders at the beginning of them coming into leadership. The *vā* is multi-directional (goes both ways, and many ways) and the SLT exercises this by acknowledging the relational space of the younger leader to the elder; the less experienced to the more experienced but also vice versa for both relational spaces. This is supported by Airini et al., (2010) who emphasizes that the *vā* has multiple narratives as each narrative relates differently to each other and highlights the importance of nurturing and maintaining respectful relationships.

The intentional building of the *vā* between the SLT and the value their teachers bring is also another formula of success for equitable outcomes for Pasefika learners. The BoT value their staff of teachers because they are the essence of what makes the school successful and do not compromise on employing quality teachers that align with the school's vision. This resonates with Si'ilata et al., (2018) and Bishop (2019) who both advocate the importance of having high quality teaching to manage the strengths and diverse needs of Pasefika learners and to build strong teacher-learner relationships.

The sense of connectivity is when learners feel valued, seen and a genuine connection to their teachers which in turn leads to greater engagement in learning. There needs to be connectivity between all who share the common interest in the success of the learner. Connection between leadership, their teachers, learners, families and community are key connections that are critical to supporting learner success. Connectivity is a big part of the Pasefika way of life. When Pasefika learners arrive at school, they come with their connections to their nucleus family, extended family, church, sports club, cultural performing arts club and village life (just to name a few), so hence it is important that Pasefika learners feel this connectivity in their school environment because it is a way of life for them. This is in alignment with the *vā* not just being an empty space, but one that connects all things (Wendt, 1999, as cited in Reynolds, 2016). Furthermore, Reynolds (2016) also explores the differences of the relational connections, but also acknowledges how the *vā* is intertwined, weaves through and connects a multitude of cultural ways of Pasefika thinking. According to Airini

et al., (2010) and Taleni et al., (2017) connectedness through a way that is familiar to Pasefika learners, by building meaning family connections is paramount to the learners' wellbeing and is a gateway for engagement.

A further insight emerged through the sub theme of cultural connection, particularly when speaking and conversing in our mother tongue (Samoan) with some of the leaders, which helped to break down relational barriers between myself and the participants. According to the MoE (1996), the document advocates for the validation of culture, language and identity and is the first official ministry strategic plan to raise the quality of Pasefika education in New Zealand. Furthermore, Alton-Lee (2011) also notes that another factor of successful learner outcomes is having a deep connection with the learner's families by acknowledging their cultural language and identity by encouraging learners to utilise their first language as this helped to increase proficiency in English. The SLT also uses this strategy to connect with their own staff in the hope of fostering stronger and positive relationships.

FOSTERING OF THE VĀ

Relational trust also emerges as a key sub-theme in understanding how the vā is nurtured between the BoT and the SLT. Without relational trust as a foundation, it is difficult to nurture and foster the vā, therefore it is critical to establish relational trust. The finding shows that SLT operates under the BoT by the trust given to them by the BoT. Comments such as 'their trust is high' when referring to the BoT and we are 'blessed to sit under their leadership' shows the trust, faith and support the SLT show towards their BoT. In reciprocity, the BoT also show their trust towards the SLT by knowing that SLT makes learner-centric decisions based around the wellbeing and safety of the learner. For example, the use of school funds to support a family with paying their rent because it would impact the child's safety if the school didn't step in. The SLT made the decision to pay this out of their school funds and then informed the BoT after, to which BoT responded with *'thank you and have you sourced more wrap-around support for the family?'* (SLT Group 1, B1). This interaction shows the trust that the BoT have in their SLT to make decisions that would normally not be made at this level at mainstream schools. This finding is in alignment with Taleni et al, (2018) who emphasised that relational trust is foundational for effective leadership. Taleni et al., (2023) also states in Educational Review Office (ERO, 2016) they reported a key factor for improving learner outcomes was by the fostering of relational trust.

An important insight that supports the fostering of the vā is the expectation that SLT and staff bring their whole selves to tautua (to serve) the school community by connecting and acting from the heart, because withholding a part of themselves suggests a reluctance to share that special part with their learners. According to Airini et al., (2010), it is through these lived experiences and values that help

learners to also bring their whole selves. Bringing one's full self involves more than relying solely on head knowledge, but to understand by leading, listening and acting from their hearts (Talení & Surtees, 2024). Pasefika learners are able to feel when this is genuine and its authenticity allows for learners to develop trust and engage more meaningfully in their learning. A sense of belonging is evident through the enactment of a pedagogy of the heart, which highlights the expectation for teachers to bring their whole selves to tautua the learners.

Intentionality of actions by the SLT, where genuine care is actively demonstrated towards staff, learners and their families through personal or physical interactions, forms a key sub-theme in the nurturing of the relational vā. This encourages the learners' families to walk into the school and participate in school fono (meeting) or events, which aids in the development of the learner's self-worth because they see their parents actively caring about their education. This view aligns with that of Talení et al., (2017) who advocates for strong, personal relationships with the learner's families, which encourages educators to get out and talk to families in the carpark and connect with them on a personal level, because it shows that they are valued. The same goes for learners being greeted at the gate in the morning, with a simple hello or hug, allows for the learner to be seen and valued, which aligns with Reynolds (2016) perspective of Pasefika learners feeling a sense of relatedness and connectedness, but most of all a sense of belonging.

Additionally, working collectively in decision making by the BoT and SLT emerges as a key finding in how they actively respond to the vā. In one of the SLT talanoa sessions, a participant felt well supported and covered by their BoT and the Co-Principals because they were easy to relate to, were open, would also make the time to listen to their SLT and ask for advice if they felt unsure. They also reported that decisions were made collaboratively within the leadership so that it was an informed decision process by the SLT. Reynolds (2017) expresses that the teacher must actively get to know the learner not just as an individual, but as people with cultural ways of being, the same is expected of relationships between those in leadership roles who are in charge of ensuring that the learners are well supported. According to Si'ilata et al., (2023), when there are established relationships between leaders it fosters connectedness. When leaders are proactive in engaging on a relational level it means taking deliberate steps to building strong relationships (Talení et al, 2017).

Another theme evident in the data is how the BoT actively fosters the relational vā through positive affirmations of one another, acknowledging and honouring the work that has been done and ongoing contributions. This conveys a supportive outlook and an environment that promotes security and safety, allowing for personal and professional growth and development in a transparent environment. As highlighted by Reynolds (2017) who promotes positive cultural affirmations by being proud of your identity and culture, thus this should be used to engage learners in classrooms or to be used to affirm leadership's sense of identity.

A further finding highlighted learners having to 'mow the grass' or tidy up the vā when it was violated via words spoken or unsavoury displays of behaviour that were witnessed by the teacher. The student was instructed by the Co-Principal to go to the teacher's classroom, sit at the door and wait it out then explain themselves in humility. This is an example of building cultural awareness to foster the vā between the learner and the teacher by using a traditional cultural practice of asking for forgiveness. This acknowledgement of cultural responsive practice where culture is acknowledged and practiced is supported by Bishop (2019). The act of 'mowing the grass' or tidying up the vā resonates also with Airini et al., (2010) who advocates for the enactment of reciprocal respect between the teacher and the learner.

The vā is tangible and can be actively practiced which is evident when the learners are invited to do the prayer at their enrollment interview with their family and the Co-Principal. How a learner responds informs the Principal what the home life relationship is like, as evening prayers with family are practiced in most traditional Pasefika homes and this act of worship is done collectively with the whole family. The fluency and lack of hesitation to do the prayer emphasizes that the learner's home life is consistent and founded upon a spiritual base. This is highlighted by Airini et al., (2010) who conceptualises the vā as being seen through a spatial lens to make meaning of the spiritual and secular relationships that come into play.

Another key finding is having high expectations as part of the school culture, thus removing the impact of deficit thinking that often keeps Pasefika learners from achieving, due to pre-assumptions and biases of how to respond to Pasefika learners. This is supported by Airini et al., (2010) who advocates to see Pasefika learners for the diverse knowledge, skills and cultural funds of knowledge and expertise they bring. The findings also show that SLT not only sets the expectations for the learners, but also for their families so that everyone is on the same page. According to Atkinson (2013), Principals recognise the importance of setting high expectations across the board; and acknowledge the need for this to be embedded as school culture.

Stewardship also emerges as a key finding in how the BoT and SLT foster the vā. In the Samoan language, stewardship can be translated to tausimea; which is being entrusted to guard, protect and look after a treasure (measina). This perspective is in alignment with Taleni (2023) who acknowledges that stewardship assists in building trust, respect and the relational vā between others. The findings look at the school budgets and its allocation of funds. In mainstream schools, departments are given budgets to work within, whereas at CSS, there is a budget, but it's not a fixed amount with the belief that if funds are needed then they only need to ensure that it is purposeful and beneficial for the learner. Another example of stewardship is looking after staff wellbeing and knowing they are valued by the school leadership. One staff member who served in a pastoral

counsellor capacity, was appointed as part of the SLT team due to their ancestral knowledge input that helped to embed some of the school's policies which further exemplifies the seriousness of how the SLT value the cultural knowledge, experiences, skills and giftings their staff bring.

ENACTING THE VĀ

The enactment of the vā is about putting these relationships into practice. Pacific education is always evolving and it requires explicit attention “to the relational spaces between teachers who are largely of European cultural background and the Pacific communities, families, and students they serve.” (Chu-Fuluifaga & Reynolds, 2024, p. 3). When the vā is embedded it can inform the direction of the school. The vā is enacted by the actioning of foundational cultural values. It is lived out through actions and behaving in accordance with these values. Therefore, if the cultural values are deeply embedded, the vā is expressed in a selfless and sacred way. According to Douglas (2025), “the common and important variant of vā is the relatedness between student and teacher. Whether the teacher knows it or not, this vā exists in the various student-teacher relationships in the classroom” (page 14). The enacting of the vā is shown through the expression of relatedness through cultural values.

The essence of Pasefika leadership is seen through how the vā is enacted between one another. Cultural values of alofa (love); fa'aaloalo (respect); fa'amaualalo (humility); fetausia'i (reciprocity) and tautua (service); provide a guiding framework that informs leaders how to establish and sustain interactions in the Pasefika way. When the vā is enacted, leadership is not necessarily based on the titles you hold, but rather dictated by the mana (prestige, authoritative respect or influence) one may carry, which has been earned over time. One of the main findings is how the BoT and SLT actively teu le vā between each other through having high expectations of one another and actively practicing relational trusts when making decisions. It is also shown through how the SLT steward funds and makes decisions from a heart position by ensuring their teachers are looked after and in other cases where the learners' wellbeing and safety is the priority in their decision making. The elimination of barriers for learners stems from a core belief of the school and SLT are encouraged by the BoT to practice what they believe in with alignment to the school beliefs. The school leadership also enact on teu'ing (tidying) le vā with their community, by knowing the story of their community and acknowledging the socio-economic challenges their community faces, that act as barriers for a learner.

Cultural values are foundational in fostering the vā. The values that were most prominent in the findings were love and respect. At the core of the values is alofa (love), which connects and sustains the other values and its importance to the vā. Alofa is enacted in the way you carry yourself through your body language, gesture, voice, affirmations, forgiveness and how we heal. To show alofa is to be responsible, intentional, purposeful and have a sense of duty of care towards others (Douglas,

2025). The Fa'afaletui method is also underpinned by the cultural values of alofa and fa'aaloalo (respect) which helps to maintain the vā (Goodyear-Smith & Ofanoa, 2022). In reference to the vā between school leaders, it requires them to lead from their heart. This is displayed in my findings. Alofa is shown through how the BoT know each other on a personal level and do check-ins on each other. This is also evident when the SLT honour the passing of a loved one, by having a policy regarding a donation to help with the financial burden of a funeral. Alofa is shown when the SLT have made it a compulsory act for staff to be outside greeting learners as they come in, so that learners feel a sense of being seen and belonging to the school. Alofa is experienced when the SLT makes a decision to pay for the rent for a family that is struggling and to offer a followup wrap-around service for continued support, all to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the learner. Alofa is when the BoT do not question the SLT on such decisions but instead thank them for going above and beyond the call of duty. There is an obvious steadfast duty of care and to go the extra mile that is evidential in the strategies that nurture and strengthen the vā between the BoT, SLT, the learner, teachers and families.

Fa'aaloalo (respect) emerged as another core foundational cultural value and one that gives meaning and integrity to the vā (Anae, 2010). Being respectful of the relational vā is evident in how the SLT leads. Two of the participants are a bit younger than the team, and as they came into the role, they felt unworthy due to their lack of lived experience and for just being younger. However, respect is promoted in the school leadership as a two way 'street'. With the vā being multi-dimensional, it is not merely focused on the hierarchical vā, but one of relatedness. There is evidence in my findings that respect is paid forth to those who bring their non-educational expertise but make a meaningful contribution to the writing of school policies and frameworks. Respect is not earned, but everyone is respected, regardless of their position. School leaders see themselves on an equal playing field, everyone pulls their weight according to their strengths and giftings they bring.

Another foundational cultural value that governs how one may conduct themselves in the vā is fa'amaualalo (humility). It is not seen as a form of weakness, but one that allows for the building of relational trust, strengthening collective wisdom and shared decision making (Goodyear-Smith & Ofanoa, 2022). Humility is evident in the findings when one of the SLT comments on how humble the Co-Principals are, by understanding they don't have the answers to everything and will often consult their SLT and take on their advice to make a collective and informed decision. The cultural value of humility is a leadership quality that is evident in how the BoT and SLT enact the vā just by knowing when and when not to act but giving value to the space in between all.

The vā connects people and it is a place where people show fetuaisia'i (reciprocal) alofa, respect and tautua amongst other cultural values. In the act of teu le vā (tidying up, nurturing of the inbetweeness) it highlights the importance and sacredness of reciprocal relationships (Talení, 2023).

Reciprocity is evident in the findings through the mutual respect that the school leadership show towards one another and this is seen through the authentic alofa and fa'aaloalo when they talanoa and discuss things. They are never in competition with one another; each upholds the vision of the school by contributing whatever skill or expertise they carry.

The relational vā is grounded in tautua (service) of and to one another. The very action of serving one another is the physical expression of the vā in play. To be in servitude to one another is a form of looking after and nurturing the relational vā. It is a tangible expression of the vā in action, enacted selflessly and one that is firmly rooted in alofa (Talení & Surtees, 2024). Tautua is evident in the findings through the relationship of the BoT amongst themselves, their service towards supporting and trusting the SLT; the elevation of a staff member to a SLT position who was not a teacher but provided services to the SLT and tautua to the vision of the school. The findings also showed SLT enacting the value of tautua through their interactions with their families and community.

The relational vā between the BoT (governance) and SLT (leadership) are crucial in establishing equitable outcomes for Pasifika learners. According to Youngs et al., (2007) the governance and leadership need to work collectively and be accountable as partners and this is seen in the relationship between the CSS BoT and SLT by the way they speak highly of each other. This is inevitable when you see the trust the BoT has in the SLT when it comes to decision-making, and in the SLT's confidence, the BoT will stand behind them and with gratitude. This is especially clear in moments where the SLT has stepped in to support a learners' family, such as offering to help pay the rent, showing a shared commitment to removing barriers and going beyond what is required to support the safety and wellbeing of the learner.

When both governance and leadership are aligned and come together for the good of the learner there is an overflow of that onto the rest of the staff, families and community. In the flourishing of relationships through the constant fostering and nurturing of the vā, it is evident at CSS the work that goes into maintaining the vā between both. This is evident in not only their professional relationships but connecting on a personal level with the check ins and seeing how everyone is doing, there is authentic relational building through the care and love shared amongst each participant.

With the vā being complex in structural form, it does require effort to maintain, especially when there are prevalent cultural factors such as having to respect your elders despite being in the same role. Youngs et al. 2006. It is about learning how to navigate both worlds, the professional and the cultural relational self, by being respectful and acknowledging by the way one behaves and conducts themselves in these situations. The SLT have leaders that are a lot younger than the other leaders. These younger leaders are able to express themselves freely and contribute on a professional level mostly because the SLT encourages them to do so and when at the roundtable of leaders, they are

all equal however. Respect is shown by the way the younger leaders carry themselves and by how they trust and respect the 'elder' SLT leaders. This is a flow on effect from the BoT and SLT's relational vā. As explained by Youngs et al. (2007) states that, the relationship between the board chair and the principal are particularly important, especially their communication, as it directs the flow of how the school is governed and managed. Similarly, Uiterwijk-Luikh et al. (2019) found that if both the governance and leadership align and work collectively towards their shared vision as a school, it is reflected by the commitment and motivation of teachers.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

OVERVIEW

The aim of this research is to examine how the *vā* shapes school leadership strategies to enhance selected Pasefika learner outcomes. It is evident in the findings and literature review that relationships are key to the success of Pasefika learners (Airini et al., 2010; Alton-Lee, 2011; Bishop, 2019; Reynolds, 2019; Taleni, 2023). Learning how to navigate this *vā*, comes from first acknowledging that a *vā* exists, and reiterating that the *vā* is not in the form of a void space, but one that holds a sacred space for relationships to be nurtured in the form of building relational trust, respect and love. The gathering, sharing and weaving of the participants' perspectives on how the *vā* is experienced at a leadership level, is reflective of the intentional time spent in getting to know each other personally and professionally. The interweaving of these perspectives correlates with the Fa'afaletui method of weaving together and creation of new knowledge (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022). It is therefore appropriate that the Talanoa methodology, which seeks to unpack and go deeper into people's perspectives and lived experiences of truth (Mafale'o et al., 2024; Vaiioleti, 2006), is used in this context of how the *vā* is experienced by school leadership in their own lived reality.

In this chapter I will respond to the research questions to shape the conclusions of this research topic. The research questions are:

1. How do the Board of Trustees or Senior Leadership Team understand and experience the *vā*?
2. What strategies have the Board of Trustees or Senior Leadership Team used to enhance selected Pasifika learner outcomes?
3. How is the *vā* evident in the Board of Trustees or Senior Leadership Team strategies for improving selected Pasefika learner outcomes?

The *vā* serves as a catalyst for Pasefika learner success and the BoT and SLT show their acknowledgement and understanding of the *vā* through their own personal references towards each other (Airini et al., 2010; Bishop, 2019; Matapo & Baice, 2020; Reynolds, 2019; Taleni, 2023). The *vā* is enacted between both through their understanding that the *vā* is vast, hard to comprehend, but it dictates how we relate to each other and how we understand how things operate around us. The *vā* is a concept that is not singular when it comes to personal understanding and practice, because it is focused on people and relationships. There needs to be respect for how individuals and collectives understand and practice their understanding of the *vā*. There are multiple definitions of the *vā* but are all dependent on the context and how each participant shares their own lived experience meaning of the relational *vā*. The *vā* requires to be fostered and nurtured by checking in with one another and staying connected, not just on a professional level, but in the sharing of

personal lives. The vā is also described as tangible and this is evident when the Principal interviews new students to lead in prayer. This gives the Principal insight into the family relational vā if the learner is able to or not able to conduct a prayer. Understanding the vā also means to find value in others and treat them accordingly, by acknowledging the skills they bring to the workplace. Their understanding of the structure of relational vā is not only professional hierarchy, but more entrenched in the cultural aspect of vā which is respecting your elders. The vā can be played out in many ways, and the BoT and SLT see the vā as interchangeable, but interdependent and reliant on the relational and connection with the other person. The vā is also experienced reciprocally and embedded in the cultural values of respect, love, humility, reciprocity and service. The vā is understood to flourish if the BoT and SLT show relational trust (Youngs et al., 2007), transparency and a heart for stewardship. It is not easy to articulate the vā because it is dependent on your own lived experience, but the commonality shows that despite different perspectives, the vā, although complex, helps Pasefika to know how to understand and be aware of the vā in terms of their positionality and responsibility. It also helps Pasefika to show compassion towards one another.

The BoT and SLT use various strategies to enhance selected Pasifika outcomes by fostering the relational vā, which is a catalyst for Pasifika learner success. The leadership team experiences the vā as complex and deeply relational, enacted through one another as seeing each other as a family member ('sis') but especially from the respect one holds for their elders, despite their professional status. This is reciprocated in how the BoT and SLT fosters a safe environment built on mutual trust, transparency, service, and where the BoT empowers the SLT to make learner-centric decisions based on a shared vision of stewardship. Strategies implemented by the SLT revolve around the goal of making the learners feel a sense of belonging and connectivity through intentional gate greetings and the act of 'mowing the grass' to repair relational spaces between teachers and students. One of the school's foci is to remove barriers to learning by providing free meals, uniforms and stationery, and using school funds for emergency family needs like rent to ensure a learners safety and wellbeing. The school actively works to shift deficit paradigms by encouraging the learner to embrace their culture and identity as opposed to assimilating to the dominant culture. Furthermore, the school leadership actively rejects deficit theorising by valuing ancestral intelligence and cultural capital over traditional academic qualifications, while also providing an avenue to provide PLD for staff to teach subjects that were previously not available like Physics and Maths with Calculus. The unpacking of cultural practices like the ifoga by making the curriculum responsive to cultural, language and identity. The value of the relational vā that is embedded in ancestral intelligence or cultural capital is evident where the SLT have members who have degrees in other disciplines but are highly valued due to their cultural knowledge.

Other leadership strategies involve connecting to the community by making the school leaders accessible to the families every Tuesday builds trust and relationship between the learner and their

families. During enrolment interviews it is expected that families are accompanied by their child so as to establish family like relationships with the school. Pasefika language weeks are celebrated and are an opportunity for families to come and support their child at school. The strategies implemented by BoT and SLT empowers and flows down to their staff and learners which leads to equitable learner outcomes.

The relational vā is evident in school leadership strategies, not as a vague framework, but one that is tangible, sacred betweenness which serves as the main catalyst for all learner success. The key findings all point back to the importance of the relational vā between BoT and SLT, SLT to teachers, teachers to learners, the school to the learner's family and lastly to the community. The vā is not empty, but active and it serves as the core factor to achieving successful outcomes. It is most evident in the cultural values that have been explored. The intentions of the heart are important when you are placed in a leadership role that is about nurturing and serving others. Service is entrenched in the vā, you cannot separate it and this is exhibited through how the BoT and SLT relate to each other. Their vā was vibrant and alive, this entrenchment was freeing, releasing and empowering rather than suffocating. When you intentionally serve the vā between other leaders, it empowers yourself as a leader and the other who is being served, just as the Samoan proverb states 'O le ala i le pule, o le tautua' which translates as 'the way to leadership is through service'. The heart behind any relationship is rooted in love and respect and the success of any relationship is reciprocity of such values. It allows for the learner to feel safe, empowered and seen in these spaces. The vā is not solely about nurturing people; its relational nature also emphasizes being a steward to keep the space tidy and free from unresolved conflict, as teachers intentionally and consistently nurture those relationships. The BoT and SLT are examples of professional stewardship which operates in high levels of relational trust and respect. The high expectations they have of their staff and students but also upon themselves shows they do not see themselves as any better, but as instruments for support and motivation of others, in particular the learners.

The findings align with the existing literature, reinforcing the idea that Pasefika learner outcomes improve when the relational vā is recognised, nurtured and intentionally enacted upon. This flows from the BoT to the Principals, the SLT, staff, learners, families and community. Within the NZ context there is some research to support this argument, in how the fostering of relationships results in successful Pasefika, but also not simply viewing the vā as 'empty' but understanding that the vā is active and encompasses many things. It requires school leaders to actively foster and nurture the vā through intentional actions of mutual respect, love, service, humility and reciprocity. It also challenges the heart position of oneself; if they are in this role for the right reason which is to effectively enhance learner outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The findings arising from this study carry important implications for school leaders who are intentional about the educational needs and improving learner outcomes for Pasefika learners. The primary implication for school governance and leadership is to move away from traditional hierarchical towards a partnership that is built through relational trust. Another key implication is for governance to empower their leaders to act as stewards and understanding that being in such a role is purposeful and requires reciprocal accountability. To be able to steward something with care comes from the implication that decisions are made when alofa is practiced by encouraging each other to bring their whole selves in service to one another. One of the key roles in the school are that of the BoT and the Principal and this relational needs to be constantly nurtured, by regular check-ins and upheld by cultural values.

Other implications include actively dismantling and challenging deficit thinking, not just in the learners but in ourselves as educators when in positions of influence, especially to be rid of bias or assumptions that dictate how we relate to one another. The celebration of diverse cultures, languages and identities within the school brings in the school community but also allows Pasefika learners to feel 'seen' and valued as Pasefika.

Leadership strategies need to understand it is not just about transactional academic management of data but to also include intentional tidying up of the vā by including cultural practices to ensure learner and staff wellbeing is looked after. The upskilling or provision for cultural PLD to support teachers and learners and empower them by using what is familiar to Pasefika learners. There is more to a student than quantitative achievement data.

The elimination of barriers to learning is an implication that requires careful planning and steps to ensure that learners are given the opportunity for quality education no matter their socio-economic situation. It just means the learner is able to focus on education and value the opportunity.

Connectivity between each other as leaders; being mutually respectful and acknowledging the talents that each brings to the table to serve the community. Such implications require school leaders to be transparent, steadfast and to lead with their hearts. Implications are for school leaders to have an awareness and understanding of the vā and how this influences Pasefika learner outcomes and school culture of inclusivity.

This relational principle is transferable to other contexts for other schools and for leadership development that is not just about student outcomes. The strategy is the heart pedagogy for teaching and relating to students, but also between adults particularly in the BoT to the SLT space and to SLT to staff space. The heart pedagogy is in our leadership spaces between each other as adults and

not just in the pedagogy of teaching. Implications for school leadership not just for schools of Pasefika learners but for all learners is to lead from the heart, build relationships through trust, connectivity and removal of deficit assumptions and barriers to student outcomes. The implication for any school leadership is to ensure that to nurture relationships is to ensure that the space is tidy, there is no unresolved conflict which only means that the vā constantly needs understanding, mutual respect of each other, attending to and intentional effort. It is not just an approach to improve outcomes for Pasefika learners but for any learner that needs support. It is for all who are called to be school leaders and all teachers.

LIMITATIONS

One of the main limitations is the research draws from a single site case study. It was also challenging to organise talanoa sessions with the BoT and SLT due to time and space constraints, including my own work life schedule and the difficulty in getting them altogether as I had hoped to have had more time with them. Despite this, I was still able to be present and engage in meaningful talanoa with both BoT and SLT. Another specific context that is important to note is this single site case study is faith-based and is founded upon a spiritual belief, but also the vā has a form of spirituality that is experienced differently by all. There is a spiritual element to enacting the vā, and it comes from a place of knowing your purpose and calling as an educator.

While the findings of this dissertation are grounded in specific context, they may be transferable to other settings that are similar to this case study school. The strategies that are evident in the findings can be applied to any other school or applied in a way that is suitable for the culture of any other school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There needs to be more intentional research into the vā at a leadership level and how they foster the vā between each other. A further course of action would be to have some more case studies of other schools with Pasefika learners, look how their school leadership relates to one another and what impact it has on Pasefika learner outcomes. There needs to be a re-think of practice in Pasefika education and look towards culturally anchored practices (Reynolds, 2018; Si'ilata et al., 2023). The main point is when school leaders and teachers are able to nurture the space, learners and their families will naturally engage.

Table 6.1 The recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOSTERING THE VA BETWEEN:			
BoT and SLT	SLT and TEACHERS	TEACHERS and LEARNERS	SCHOOL and learner FAMILIES, COMMUNITY
• Foster family-like relationships when leading each other and SLT. • Actively teu le vā with humility through transparency, respect and service of one another. • Eliminate deficit theorising, bias, and assumptions within leadership and practice. • Remove holistic barriers so learners can focus on learning rather than socio-economic stressors • Value staff and learners for the cultural capital and ancestral intelligence they bring. • Commit to a pedagogy of the heart by leading authentically and bringing one's whole self into the school space. • Establish culturally grounded leadership and pedagogy through strong relationships between the BoT and SLT. • Develop policies that uphold and reflect cultural practices and traditions	• Leadership assumes the role of tautai (navigator) by fostering connectedness, collaboration, and collective stewardship for learners. • Provide a culturally responsive curriculum that values learners' identities and allows home knowledge and life skills to be integrated into school learning. • Create environments that nurture spiritual wellbeing, cultural identity and a sense of belonging. • Foster family-like relationships through humility, transparency, respect and active teu le vā. • Value staff and learners for the cultural capital and ancestral intelligence they bring. • Remove deficit theorising, bias and assumptions while maintaining high expectations for Pasefika learners. • Commit to a pedagogy of the heart by leading authentically and bringing one's whole	• Provide a warm, culturally affirming, and welcoming classroom environment that fosters belonging. • Incorporate learning experiences that encourage learners to bring their cultures, identities, and lived experiences into the classroom. • Acknowledge and celebrate the diverse cultural identities and strengths of Pasefika learners. • Adopt a family-like approach grounded in Pasefika values such as love, respect, humility, reciprocity, and service. • Build and sustain mutual respect and relational trust with learners and their families. • Get to know learners as individuals with unique cultural nuances beyond their academic identity. • Create opportunities for Pasefika learners to lead in areas of strength so their voices, talents and contributions are recognised and celebrated.	• Be proactive and relationally engaged with the community through visible present and intentional relationship-building. • Create, build and sustain the relational vā by connecting with families and communities beyond the school setting. • Invite families and communities into the school once relational trust and connection have been established. • Provide a warm, culturally welcoming environment that fosters belonging and inclusion. • Acknowledge and celebrate the diverse cultural identities within the school community • Get to know the community and their unique cultural nuances. • Adopt a family-like approach that nurtures connection, care, and a sense of belonging. • Establish a sacred feagaiga with families and

	self into the school space. • Develop mutual trust by recognising strengths and identifying areas where support is needed. • Engage in and promote PLD using the MoE Action Plan for Pacific Education 2020-2030 and TAPASA Cultural competencies framework for Teachers of Pacific learners.		communities through visible presence, relationship building, and meaningful engagement. • Commit to a pedagogy of the heart and tautua to the community.
• RECOMMENDATIONS THAT BRIDGE RELATIONSHIPS FROM BoT, SLT, TEACHERS, LEARNERS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY			
• Be intentionally active in approaching and being welcoming. • Build connections by prioritising relational trust and genuine care for others • Respect goes both ways, it is not earned but a must regardless of your title or role you play. • Be culturally teachable to embrace diversity and learn about colleagues and learners cultural identity and languages by explicitly asking them. • Paradigm shift from deficit thinking to an asset-based view of Pasefika educators, learners, families and community by valuing the diverse knowledge, expertise, skills, values and lived experiences they bring. • Address systemic racism by honouring cultural onto-epistemology (ways of knowing, being and relating to the world) an act to decolonise education to celebrate the success Pasefika brings.			

There are some obvious overlaps of recommendations between the categories and the bridging recommendations are relevant to all the categories. The overlapping of the recommendations is reminiscent of the Fa'afaletui methodology which weaves knowledge, values and nurturing of relationships (Goodyear-Smith & 'Ofanoa, 2022). The participants expressed their own perspective as to how the vā was experienced within the leadership. It is through this weaving of knowledge and lived experiences that transformative knowledge bases are acknowledged (Mafile'o et al., 2024). The vā requires ongoing tidying up, protection and strengthening through the continual practice of teu le vā across the school. The hope is that if BoT and SLT are at a certain level of mutual respect and trust, there is not too much tidying up to do, but then it provides SLT a strong foundation to then tidy up spaces with teachers, learners, families and the community. It is also hoped that the concepts of relational vā, together with pedagogy from the heart explored within this research can be adapted and applied within any work setting where there is a diverse group of people.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

My motivation to embark on this research was to counter my unease of Pasefika learners being labelled as underachievers for many years. As an educator I have witnessed and experienced the displeasure of being boxed in as a Pasefika because of biases and assumptions. I have observed many great educators who have a heart for Pasefika outcomes but I have also experienced a disconnect when strategising for better outcomes. I have always felt that as Pasefika we are expected to just fit into a world that doesn't correlate with our way of doing things. I have seen many Pasefika learners being sent to my office because I am Pasefika and I will know how to support them; but my heart has always wanted to ensure that Pasefika should be able to go to anyone in the school to support them. The whole idea of seeing how school leaders manage the vā made me wonder that if it is being practiced from the top, then that culture will flow down to the teachers and then the learners. The vā is special to me because it guides, leads, protects me and provides a sense of calmness in my own being. In reflection, the vā - if nurtured and fostered from a heart pedagogy that puts others first and keeps me humble to know I am here to serve with intention and purpose, then a learner should in effect feel loved, seen, protected and safe to explore and push themselves to be the best they can be

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GLOSSARY

Aiga	family
Ali'i	Samoaan High Chief
Alofa	love
Fa'aaloalo	respect
Fa'amaualalo	humility
Fa'atuatua	faith
Feagaiga	unity, marriage
Fetausia'i	reciprocity
Fono	meeting
Lotu	prayer
Malaga	journey
Mana	strength, prestige, authoritative respect
Matai	chief
Measina	treasure
Pou	pillar
Tamā	Father
Tinā	Mother
Tama'ita'i	woman
Tausi	to look after
Tausimea	keeper or protector of treasures
Tautai	navigator
Tautua	service
Teutusi	envelope
Teu le vā	tidy up the space
Vā fealoaloa'i	space between relational arrangements
Vā tapuia	sacred space

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION SHEET



Organisational Information Sheet

Date that data collection will start:

28 May 2025

Project Title

A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes.

Talofa lava, malo lava le soifua maua ma le lagi e mama,

My name is Atua Asafo, and I am the Researcher for this project. I am currently enrolled in a Master of Education degree at the Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. I would like to invite your school's senior leaders and board of trustee members to participate in a research study on *A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes*. The study is being carried out as a requirement for the *Master of Education*.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to see how the Senior Leadership team (SLT) and Board of Trustees (BoT) use the vā to shape school strategies to help improve Pasifika learner outcomes. The hope is that these insights and experiences will be used to support other leadership teams in schools who aim to improve Pasifika learner outcomes. The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was our organisation identified and why is our organisation being invited to participate in this research?

I am looking for a school that had a strong Pasifika emphasis especially in their value systems and a school that is culturally responsive to the needs of Pasifika learners. [REDACTED] fits this expectation.

I am therefore seeking permission to access the senior leadership team and Board of Trustee members of [REDACTED]

Participants will be from Pacific Advance Secondary School leadership team which includes:

- Board of Trustees Members
- School Principal
- Senior Management Leaders

How does our organisation agree to participate in this research?

Your organisation's participation in this research is voluntary.

Your organisation has the option of being named to recognise their contribution to the research, and if so that only limited confidentiality can be offered to participants.

If you agree to give consent as an organisation, please complete and email back to the researcher the organisational consent form. Thank you.

The researcher will do a follow-up in 10 days of this being sent via email, to confirm your organisation's participation or non-participation.

What will our organisational participation involve?

The senior leadership team and Board of Trustees participants from your organisation will be invited to be part of a Talanoa focus group, that will be held on the school premises. There will be two separate groups (senior leadership team group and board of trustees group). Each group will have two Talanoa sessions (face to face) each, with the sessions lasting up to an hour each. A third Talanoa session will be a one hour follow up interview with the principal and one board member. These interviews will be conducted separately and will take place in a meeting room or office space that will be negotiated between the researcher and the participant. A list of indicative questions will be provided for the participants before the Talanoa sessions.

I also seek permission to access secondary data and documents like the school strategic plans, reviews of de-identified student attendance data, and selected de-identified Pasifika learner data for data analysis.

What are the benefits?

Your organisation will have the opportunity to provide insight that would support and encourage school leaders to understand the importance of the vā and its connection to supporting Pasifika learner success. This is an opportunity to share what your organisation has experienced through their skills, knowledge and wisdom with other school leadership teams who seek to find strategies that could support their Pasifika learners.

What are the costs?

There are no initial costs for the research, all it requires is commitment of time for the three Talanoa sessions at the school premises. In recognition of your organisation's participation, food will be provided for each Talanoa session and a gift card of \$50.00 for each participant's time of sharing on the last session.

Will the results of the study be published?

The results of this research will be published as my *Master of Education dissertation*. This dissertation will be available to the public through the AUT library. Results may be published in peer-reviewed, academic journals. The school and participants will not be identifiable in any publication.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is unlikely there will be any discomforts or risks because a strengths-based approach underpins the heart of this research. Due to my own strong cultural background; my experience as a youth mentor and educator within my own West Auckland community; and my Matai (chief) service to my extended village both in NZ and Samoa, I deeply value and am aware of Talanoa protocols.

What will happen to information about me?

- The data collected will be non-identifiable it will be coded. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym. The researcher will hold the list linking the pseudonym with the name of the participant.
- Research data will be stored securely on the supervisor/applicant's AUT OneDrive.
- Participant information, consent information and any research data collected during Talanoa sessions will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Consent forms will be stored securely on the supervisor/applicant's AUT OneDrive. Once the research is complete, consent forms will be stored in the School of Education's locked filing cabinet for ethics documents, in room A208, where the School of Education is currently located.
- By signing the consent form, your organisation is agreeing to allow the researcher to invite your senior leadership and board of trustee members to participate.
- After six years soft copies will be deleted, and the cloud-based data will be wiped by professional data storage specialists. The hard copy consent forms will also be shredded after six years.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

As the principal of your organisation your consent then allows for the researcher to invite your senior leadership and board of trustee members to participate. You also have a maximum of two weeks to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, you will receive a summary of the final report of this research in person, or as a written document.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. If you have any questions, concerns or require any further information about this research, please get in contact with Atua Asafo or Dr. Howard Youngs.

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *see details below*.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Who do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Atua Asafo

[Student email has been removed from public version of manuscript](#)

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Howard Youngs

howard.youngs@aut.ac.nz

(+649) 921 9999 ext 9633

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *May 2025*, AUTECH Reference number *25/125*.

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET



Participant Information Sheet

Date that data collection will start:

14 May 2025

Project Title

A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes.

Talofa lava, malo lava le soifua maua ma le lagi e mama,

My name is Atua Asafo and I am the Researcher for this project. I am currently enrolled in a Master of Education degree at the Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. You are invited to participate in a research study on *A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes*. The study is being carried out as a requirement for the *Master of Education*.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to see how the Senior Leadership team (SLT) and Board of Trustees (BoT) use the vā to shape school strategies to help improve Pasifika learner outcomes. The hope is that these insights and experiences will be used to support other leadership teams in schools who aim to improve Pasifika learner outcomes. The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

I am looking for a school that has a strong Pasifika emphasis especially in their value systems and a school that is culturally responsive to the needs of Pasifika learners. [REDACTED] fits this expectation and your Principal has provided organisational consent for me to contact you.

Participants will be from [REDACTED] leadership team includes:

- Board of Trustees Members
- School Principal
- Senior Management Leaders

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you wish to participate in this research, there is a consent form attached that you would need to sign and return to me (the researcher) via email.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and you may withdraw from the study, by informing the researcher, at any time without being disadvantaged in any way. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the de-identified information collected up until your withdrawal from the study will continue to be used and included in the study to protect its quality.

The researcher will do a follow-up in 10 days of this being sent via email, to confirm participation or non-participation. You have a maximum of two weeks to respond to this invitation.

Should your school choose to be named in connection with this research, please note that limited liability applies.

What will my participation involve?

The senior leadership team and Board of Trustees' participants from your organisation will be part of a Talanoa focus group, that will be held on the school premises. There will be two separate groups (senior leadership team group and board of trustees group). Each group will have two Talanoa sessions (face to face), with the sessions lasting up to an hour each for each group. A third Talanoa session will be a one hour follow up interview with the principal and one board member, these interviews will be conducted separately and will take place in a meeting room or office space that will be negotiated between the researcher and the participant. A list of indicative questions will be provided for the participants before the Talanoa and interview sessions.

What are the benefits?

You will have the opportunity to provide insight that would support and encourage school leaders to understand the importance of the vā and its connection to supporting Pasifika learner success. This is an opportunity to share your experiences, skills, knowledge and wisdom with other school leadership teams who seek to find strategies that could support their Pasifika learners.

What are the costs?

There are no initial costs for the research, all it requires is commitment of time for the two Talanoa sessions at the school premises and the third if you are the Principal or Board member who agree to participate in this final Talanoa session. In recognition of your participation, food will be provided for each Talanoa session and a gift card of \$50.00 for each participant's time of sharing which will be presented in your final Talanoa session.

Will the results of the study be published?

The results of this research will be published as my *Master of Education dissertation*. This dissertation will be available to the public through the AUT library. Results may be published in peer-reviewed, academic journals. You and the school will not be identifiable in any publication as all participants will be allocated a pseudonym.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is unlikely there will be any discomforts or risks because a strengths-based approach underpins the heart of this research. Due to my own strong cultural background; my experience as a youth mentor and educator within my own West Auckland community; and my Matai (chief) service to my extended village both in NZ and Samoa, I deeply value and am aware of Talanoa protocols.

What will happen to information about me?

- The data collected about the school as the organisation, will be non-identifiable (confidential). Pseudonyms will be used to protect the participant and their identity.
- There will be no identifiable information, it will be coded. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym. The researcher will hold the list linking the pseudonym with the name of the participant and this list will be deleted at the end of the research. Only the research will have access to this list.
- No other information about the participant is being sought for this research (e.g. health, education or other organisational records).
- Your consent is required for the use of your confidential data for this research project.
- Research data will be stored securely on the supervisor/applicant's AUT OneDrive.
- Participation information, consent information and any research data collected during Talanoa sessions will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Consent form will be stored securely on the supervisor/applicant's AUT OneDrive. Once the research is complete, consent forms will be stored in the School of Education's locked filing cabinet for ethics documents, in room AS208, where the School of Education is currently located.
- After six years soft copies will be deleted, and the cloud-based data will be wiped by professional data storage specialists. The hard copy consent forms will be shredded after six years.

- By signing the consent form, you as the participant are agreeing to allow for the use of your information as stated in this Information Sheet.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Participation in this research is voluntary, and participants are encouraged to consider this invitation before deciding to participate. Participants have a maximum of two weeks to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, you will receive a summary of the final report of this research in person, or as a written document.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Please keep this information sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. If you have any questions, concerns or require any further information about this research, please get in contact with Atua Asafo or Dr. Howard Youngs.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Researcher Contact Details:

Atua Asafo

[Student email has been removed from public version of manuscript](#)

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Howard Youngs

howard.youngs@aut.ac.nz

(+649) 921 9999 ext 9633

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on May 2025, AUTECH Reference number 25/125.

APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM FOR INDIVIDUAL TALANOA PARTICIPATION



Consent Form for individual Talanoa participation

Project title: A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes.

Project Supervisor: Dr. Howard Youngs

Researcher: Atua Asafo

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 14 May 2025.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part. The de-identified information collected up until my withdrawal from the study will continue to be used and included in the study to protect its quality.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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.....
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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on May 2025, AUTEK Reference number 25/125.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

APPENDIX 4: PERMISSION FOR RESEARCHER TO ACCESS SCHOOL STAFF AND BOARD



Permission for researcher to access school staff and Board members

Project title: A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes.

Project Supervisor: Dr. Howard Youngs

Researcher: Atua Asafo

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 14 May 2025.
- ☐ I give permission for the researcher to undertake research within _____
- ☐ I give permission for the researcher to access the staff / employees / Board members of _____.

Permission to name school

- **Yes**, I give permission for the school to be named.
- **No**, I do **not** give permission for the school to be named; please keep the school confidential.

Note: If permission is granted, limited liability applies.

Principal's/CEO's signature:

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Principal's/CEO's name:

Principal's/CEO's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on May 2025, AUTEK Reference number 25/125

Note: The head of the organisation should retain a copy of this form.

APPENDIX 5: CONSENT FORM FOR TALANOA GROUP PARTICIPATION



Consent Form for Talanoa group participation

Project title: A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes.

Project Supervisor: Dr. Howard Youngs

Researcher: Atua Asafo

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 14 May 2025.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group, and I agree to keep this information confidential.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part. The de-identified information collected up until my withdrawal from the study will continue to be used and included in the study to protect its quality.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on May 2025, AUTEK Reference number 25/125.

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form

APPENDIX 6: TALANOA SESSIONS - INDICATIVE QUESTIONS

Talanoa sessions - indicative questions

Research Working Title:
A Case Study of how the Vā Shapes School Leadership Strategies to Enhance Selected Pasifika Learner Outcomes.
Research Question(s):
How may the fostering of the vā shape Senior leadership team (SLT) and Board of Trustees (BoT) strategies to enhance Pasifika learner outcomes?
Sub-questions:
1. How do Senior Leadership Team or Board of Trustee members understand and experience the vā?
2. What strategies have Senior Leadership Team or Board of Trustees used to enhance selected Pasifika learner outcomes?
3. How is the vā evident in Senior Leadership Team or Board of Trustees strategies for improving selected Pasifika learner outcomes?

TALANOA SESSION QUESTIONS

There are three forms of Talanoa sessions, one hour maximum for each. The first two sessions will be done with two separate groups: Group 1 – Senior Leadership Team and Group 2 – Board of Trustees. The third Talanoa session will be a follow-up interview, one with the principal and one with a board member, which will be conducted separately. I have structured the indicative questions as having Talanoa session 1 predominantly about the vā; Talanoa session 2 about the leadership strategies that incorporate the vā and the last session will focus on how leadership maintains the vā. In total there are four group Talanoa sessions and two individual Talanoa sessions.

	<i>Talanoa Session 1</i>
1	What does the vā mean to you as a Senior Leadership Team or Board of Trustees and how do you experience it in your leadership practices?
2	How do you incorporate the values of vā (such as respect, connectedness and reciprocity) in your daily leadership practices with each other in and between the SLT and BoT?
3	In what ways is the vā evident in your school's leadership written and communicated strategies aimed at improving Pasifika learner outcomes?
4	How do you foster and maintain strong vā (relationships) with Pasifika families and how does this strengthen student outcomes?
5	Can you share some examples of how building positive vā relationships with Pasifika learners has led to improved academic and social outcomes?

	<i>Talanoa Session 2</i>
6	In what ways does the concept of vā influence the relationships you build with Pasifika students, families and staff?
7	Can you share an example of a time when the vā has helped shape a decision or strategy in your leadership approach to Pasifika learners? It is preferable this example is related to the management-governance space.
8	What specific leadership strategies have been implemented to support and enhance Pasifika learner outcomes. How do you know these strategies enhanced Pasifika learner outcomes?
9	What role does the community play in the school's strategic plans to improve Pasifika learner outcomes?
10	How do you measure the success of strategies that have been implemented to improve Pasifika learner outcomes, and how do you account for the vā in this process?

	<i>Talanoa Session 3: individual interviews with the principal and one board member (conducted separately).</i>
11	How do you perceive the role of vā in fostering a collaborative school environment that supports Pasifika students?
12	How do you ensure the cultural strengths and values of Pasifika learners are acknowledged and evident in your school leadership strategies?
13	How do you ensure the leadership strategies are culturally relevant and responsive to the diverse Pasifika communities within your school?
14	How do you ensure that Pasifika students' voices are included in decision making processes that impact their learning experiences and outcomes? Can you provide an example?
15	How can an understanding of the vā help other schools with a significant number of Pasifika students, particularly in the leadership – governance space between a Senior Leadership Team or Board of Trustees?

A

6
 stories that came up, but how that generation that came and laid down the baseline of: we're moving to this foreign country and we're going to better our lives. It's scary because a lot of the new parents, young parents, they don't have that. And they come and fit in (want to be kiwi). And so I sussed it out really quickly at the interview and I say to them, look, this is not a Kiwi school. If you're wanting your kids to turn into the best Kiwi Weetbix kids and learn the ads on TV. You're not going to get it here. You may as well go to the guy up the road. He's got all of those expectations. I want your kids to come here and be the best Tongan, best Tuvaluan and best Samoan, best Niuean, and we're going to do it as ourselves. And so I want, you know, so I'll ask the kid, does your mom drink tea or coffee? If they don't know, I know the culture of the house. I asked them, where does your dad work? Oh, I don't know. I know the culture of the house. And so, I say to the family, I don't care what your kid knows. I don't want to know their opinion. I just want to know, e tu'u atu le feau, momo'e (I give them a job, and they run) e vae mo'emo'e lima poto (quick on their feet, good with their hands). You know, and those are the concepts. And then you see them starting to snap out, you know, because they come in, you know, lipstick atoa, fai laei manaia (lipstick on, nice clothes) because they're wanting to impress the school and then they start to sit there and fekagisi (cry) and most of the interviews e fekagisi (cry) because it's like, Oh my gosh, I forgot, I forgot that's what we were about or I forgot that. And yeah, so it's, I can't even remember what the question was, but knowing the community, then you know the direction we need to go in.

PR 16:55

Sacrifice
of migrant
families.

New Gen of
migrants are
different attitude

→ Expectation
cultural identity

→ observ'n of
home life.

→ expectation
to do + listen
not give their
opinion.

↓ struggle of
migrant parents trying
to fit in + not teaching
the values-tradition.

Know their stories

Cultural
capital
BE PROUD.

Know your
Community
stories.

By the time they're 18 or 19.

PR 20:05

Great, thank you for that. Second to last question. How do you ensure that Pasifika student voices are included in your decision making that impact their learning?

B5 20:13

E tautala gaioiga - Actions speak. And so, they say things, but then we watch their actions and that's what we go by. So, their actions scream far louder than their words. And so, we'll lay out this is what's happening. Say for example, we'll say to a group, you guys are going to design your own training for eight weeks. So come up with a program. We go there and they can't manage it. They don't have intensity, they don't have goals, they don't have all of this. Then their actions are telling us we don't, we can't do that. And so we will put somebody in there to do it to them and then they'll see another group that can do it and they'll see, wow, if only we just used our brains and did what we already know to do, we'll show them that we're self-managers and we can go and these other people are doing these amazing adventurous stuff like paddling out for four kilometres out to sea and they come back and tell them and but so the actions tell what they're ready for and what they can and can't do and then it also opens up the boundaries that we have, so yeah, some might be year 13, but their behaviour, they can't manage themselves. I'll have a year 9 manage the group ahead of them. And we all, all staff and all students, we're on a leadership program that starts from right time, right place, right gear. If we can manage that, oh, we're moving on and then right attitude. So, we might have stuff going on in our life, but if I and we can manage our attitude, then we're showing we're ready for next level leadership. That's a staff member and a student.

managing small things.

So, a lot of staff. I've had staff ask me, what do I need to do to move up to the next level of leadership, you know, and I say, man, you know, actually if you can just get here on time, oh, I'll stand at the gate and salute you, you know. And so, it's like know where you are, you know, know, - life experiences. be self-aware before you ask. And so, the kids, the kids voice is through the action. They open up doors for themselves through the action. We've got a kid here, matua i vaivai a i le vasega (very weak in her class), but she is the boss of the kitchen.

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observed

curriculum-
(cultural)

related.

relational
- in trible
- allows them
to articulate
their needs
voices.

- Learner leadership
programme
- trust.

- Empower
their voice.
- trust
- growing
leadership
according to
own display
of skills.

- Balance.

- self-aware
- Expectations
- learner expectations
- self-mgmt
- self-mgmt

APPENDIX 8: PROCESS OF ANALYSIS EXTRACT OF KEY FINDINGS

CHAPTER 4 DATA

A case study of how the va shapes school leadership strategies to enhance selected Pasifika learner outcomes

1. How do SLT BOT understand and experience the va?
2. What strategies have SLT BOT used to enhance selected Pasifika outcomes
3. How is the va evident in SLT BOT strategies for improving P. outcomes

THEMES:

Main themes	Sub themes	Sub sub themes
Va - constant, evolving, developing, not empty, but betweenness of connectivity, encompassing, holistic, universal everyday life, connectedness, nurturing	wellbeing	Triangulation vs stand alone silo Compass KAIROS vs chronos time
Space, proximity Timeliness, dialogic	Collective vs indiv Western pedagogy Rethink to apply to minority learners care, love, high capacity Whaka whanau tangi, reciprocal, humanistic Holistic approach.	Frangip Build relationships acknowledge culture
Power sharing, power imbalance, equity transformative sharing of expertise, listen to learners, know me to teach me, pulling down dominant role of this -> family	Structure - linear vs multi layer, complex Promotion based on expert vs academic quals of leaders	
Barriers Deficit theorizing vs intentional engagement Biases, stereotype responses Unawareness of biases, high expectations vs assumption perspective, cultural misconceptions barriers	Child centric - revolves around learner Tapasa	
Values - love, respect, service, trust, sacrifice, humility, ownership, stewardship, transparency, relational, Pasifika shared cultural values, reliance on one another	Socio-eco - gang, community, poverty, compassion - paying rent - Father-daughter debt. (Frangip) - Parents traversing 2 worlds school expects Parents too.	

High Expectations

Remove barriers

Relational Va.

Trust
- connectivity
- Elders.
- boundaries.
- gate keeping
- child vs adult.
- connectivity/comm.
- reciprocal.

Leadership as Ten Le Va.

Village/fambs.
- remove barriers
- power sharing.
- Eliminate Barriers.
- Stewardship
- High expect.
- Comm. engagement.

Cultural Capital

Ancestral intelligence
- village.
- deficit theorizing
- Bias/s, stereotypes.
- remove barriers.
- Values
- Spiritual/Holistic.
- Child-centre Village

village/family - connectivity

collaborative

1 wins we all win

Village - fa'amatala

Feagaiga in relation to others

Va is relational dep on your role in the village eg fa'amatala, etc.

faaleagaga,

nhanan like Ray nallo.

Networking

Disruptors

Sweet spot

Cultural capital, ancestral intelligence, sustainability, indig authenticity, cultural behaviours, protocols

Leadership - pastoral, shared vision, sacredness, levels, stewardship.

Spiritual - faith, calling, purpose

Pastoral, visionary, passion

HBUSC

Pa'afalelele

Talanoa

Ten le va

Methodology

Partners Success

what success looks like